

# STANLEY BRERETON

W. HARRISON AINSWORTH



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STANLEY BRERETON



# STANLEY BRERETON

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"THE TOWER OF LONDON."



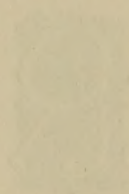
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# STANLEY BRERETON.

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## Prologue.

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SIR THOMAS STARKEY.

I.

### THE NEGLECTED WIFE.

IN the private parlour of the great banking house in the Strand, two of the partners were seated one morning, a few years ago, at a table covered with letters and accounts, most of which had been examined and put aside, but a few were left that required attention.

Both these gentlemen, though shrewd men of business, had easy, agreeable manners, and were remarkably courteous to all brought into contact with them. Mr. Moseley, the senior partner, who was rather stout, and rosy-cheeked, with grey hair, had a very pleasant expression of countenance; nor could anything be said against his partner, Mr. Vere, but the latter was decidedly the gravest of the two, and had a very keen look when making an inquiry. They were discussing an important matter that had just come before them, when a lady and gentleman were ushered into the room by a clerk, and announced as Lady Starkey and Sir John Lambert.

The two bankers immediately arose, and shook hands with Sir John, who presented her ladyship to them, while the sedate clerk placed seats for the new-comers near the table.

Though no longer young, Lady Starkey was extremely handsome, and had a tall symmetrical figure, regular features

of a proud cast, and fine, black eyes, that had lost none of their brilliancy. Her personal attractions were heightened by a very charming dress. No one, unacquainted with her history, would have imagined that such a beautiful woman could have been neglected; but Sir Thomas Starkey, it appeared, was a very indifferent husband.

Sir John Lambert, the friend by whom her ladyship was accompanied, was old enough to be her father—in fact, he had known her from childhood, and regarded her almost as a daughter. She consulted him on all important occasions, and he gave the best advice he could. He had counselled the present visit to the bankers, as he thought some information which she desired respecting her husband could be obtained from them. The old baronet, we may mention, kept a good account at the house, and was consequently much esteemed.

As time was not to be wasted in that room, Sir John was about to explain what brought Lady Starkey there, when Mr. Moseley checked him.

"Before anything is said, Sir John," remarked the banker, "I ought to state that we have received a letter this very morning from Sir Thomas Starkey, giving us certain instructions, on which we shall be pleased to act."

"Have your instructions any reference to Lady Starkey, may I ask?" inquired Sir John.

"They have," replied Mr. Moseley. "We are requested to honour her ladyship's drafts to the extent of two thousand pounds, and were just about to write to her to that effect."

"This is singular," remarked Sir John.

"Entirely unexpected on my part," said Lady Starkey. "I did not suppose Sir Thomas had written to you, gentlemen," she added.

"There is his letter, if your ladyship desires to see it," said Mr. Vere, handing it to her.

A very brief communication indeed, and containing nothing more than the order mentioned.

Lady Starkey, however, glanced at the letter inquiringly, as if to search for some information, which she did not find.

"The letter is dated yesterday," she remarked to Sir John. "But no address is given."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, taking the letter from her. "The address seems intentionally omitted. Allow me to see the envelope," he added to Mr. Vere.

But the cautious banker, who was watching him, and guessed his motive, declined.

"It is no business of ours to furnish you with Sir Thomas Starkey's address, Sir John," he replied.

"Then am I to understand, gentlemen," said Lady Starkey, with a look of displeasure, "that you refuse to inform me how I may communicate with my husband?"

"Any letter sent us by your ladyship shall be forwarded to him at once," said Mr. Vere, intimating very plainly that no more would be done.

Lady Starkey consulted Sir John Lambert by a look, but the old baronet shook his head, implying that it would be useless to pursue the inquiry further.

"We really know nothing of Sir Thomas's plans," said Mr. Moseley. "We beg your ladyship to clearly understand that you can communicate with him through us."

"You are very obliging, gentlemen," rejoined Lady Starkey, coldly. "But I don't think I shall trouble you."

"You may as well do a little business now you are here," said Sir John, smiling.

"Shall I write out a draft for your ladyship?" asked Mr. Moseley, "and for what amount?"

"Take the whole two thousand pounds," suggested Sir John. And he added *sotto voce* "you can give it, if you like, to your niece, Rose Hylton."

"Do, by all means, if your ladyship wants the money," said Mr. Moseley.

"I don't want it," she replied.

"But you may as well have it," said the banker, quickly drawing out a cheque, which he handed to her.

Lady Starkey hesitated for a moment, but at a look from Sir John, signed the cheque.

Meantime the clerk had been summoned, and was ordered to get the cheque cashed at once.

"How will your ladyship have the money?" asked Mr. Moseley.

"In bank-notes—won't you?" interposed Sir John.

Lady Starkey assented, and the clerk departed on his errand.

"I hope this is quite agreeable to your ladyship?" observed Mr. Moseley, who fancied Lady Starkey did not look altogether satisfied.

"I really don't want the money, and would rather leave it with you," she replied.

"If such is your wish it can be easily carried out," he said.

"Then I will leave it," she rejoined.

At this juncture the clerk returned with a handful of bank-notes, which he was about to deliver to Mr. Moseley.

"Take back the notes," said the banker, "and let an account be opened forthwith with Lady Starkey."

"The order was promptly obeyed, and after a little further conversation, her ladyship and Sir John were about to depart, when the greatest consternation was excited among the whole party by the sudden entrance of a tall, distinguished-looking individual.

"Why, bless my life! here's Sir Thomas Starkey in person!" said Mr. Moseley.

"My husband!" exclaimed Lady Starkey. "Let us be gone. I won't meet him."

"Stay where you are," said Sir John Lambert. "You can't avoid him now."

"Your ladyship needn't be alarmed," said Mr. Vere. "No scene can occur here."

Thus reassured, Lady Starkey did not move, while Sir Thomas stepped so quickly towards the table that the bankers could not stop him.

Sir Thomas, we have said, was tall, and we may add, that he was remarkably handsome, and had a military air.

He did not seem at all embarrassed, and scarcely deemed it necessary to apologise for his sudden entrance into the banker's private room, but he gave a little explanation as to how he came there.

"Just now, as I was walking down the Strand," he said, "I noticed your ladyship's brougham at the door of the bank, and ascertained from the footman that you and Sir John Lambert had called there, and were still within. So, as I wanted particularly to see you, I determined to take advantage of the opportunity, went in at once, and found my way to this room."

"You don't seem aware that your presence is unwelcome, Sir Thomas, and that you are interrupting business," observed Mr. Moseley.

"You ought to have sent in a clerk to inquire whether you could be admitted," added Mr. Vere. "I am surprised they let you in."

"I did not ask permission," said Sir Thomas, coolly.

"Well, since you are here, it can't be helped," rejoined Mr. Moseley. "Pray take a seat."

But Sir Thomas declined.

"I shan't stay more than a minute," he said. "I conclude, gentlemen," he added, "that you have communicated the instructions given you to Lady Starkey?"

"All has been arranged," replied Mr. Moseley.

"And entirely to my satisfaction," added Lady Starkey.

"Then I can depart in comfort," said Sir Thomas.

"Where are you going?" inquired Lady Starkey, unable to repress her curiosity.

"I scarcely know," he replied, evasively.

"Will you write me? May I write you?" she cried.

"Better not," he rejoined. The less we hear from each other the better."

"Oh! don't say so, Sir Thomas," she exclaimed. "I shall be wretched unless I have a letter from you now and then."

"These gentlemen are sure to hear from me, and will let you know where I am, and how I am."

"Yes, yes—that must suffice," said Sir John Lambert. "You can't expect more."

"But I do expect a great deal more," she cried, despairingly. "Promise me you will write before long!" she added to her truant husband.

"I can make no such promise," he rejoined, coldly.

"And I beg you not to press me to do what must needs be painful to me. Let us endeavour to forget each other."

"Impossible I can forget you, Sir Thomas," she cried.

"For your own sake—try," he rejoined. "But we are presuming on the patience of these gentlemen."

"You are in fault, Sir Thomas," said Mr. Vere. "You should not have sought this interview. You must have been sure it would greatly distress her ladyship, besides being against all our rules."

"Well, I will at once put an end to it, though I had more to say. Farewell, Kate."

And he hurried out of the room.

Lady Starkey, who had made no response to the valediction, looked as if she would faint.

"For Heaven's sake command yourself!" said Sir John, in a low tone to her. "Recollect where you are."

"Yes, I have not forgotten," she rejoined. "Excuse me, gentlemen," she added. "My feelings have quite overcome me."

"We feel deeply for your ladyship," said Mr. Vere. "Sir Thomas was much to blame for the intrusion."

"Pray, pardon him!" said Lady Starkey. "He yielded to an irresistible impulse."

"I have no doubt of that," said Mr. Moseley.

"I wish he had finished what he had to say," sighed Lady Starkey. "Give me your arm, Sir John, and come with me to my carriage. Good day, gentlemen, I am extremely obliged by your kindness."

"We only regret that our interview, which began so pleasantly, did not terminate more agreeably," said Mr. Moseley, and he and his partner attended them to the door.

Supported by her old friend, her ladyship then took her departure.

"Upon my soul!" I'm exceedingly sorry for her," said Mr. Vere, as he and his partner returned to the table. "I did not suppose she was so strongly attached to her faithless spouse."

"Yes, he doesn't deserve so charming a wife," said Mr. Moseley.

"How long has he left her?" asked Mr. Vere.

"More than a year," rejoined the other. "And in my opinion he'll never return. He's infatuated by that Mrs. Heyrick, who isn't to compare with her."

With a few more reflections of a similar kind, they resumed their work.

Meanwhile, Sir John and her ladyship had issued forth from the bank, and were met at the door by a footman, who conducted them to a very smart-looking brougham, furnished with a pair of spirited chestnuts.

"Come back with me to Berkeley-square, Sir John," said her ladyship, as she got into the carriage. "I want to talk to you."

The old baronet assented, and seated himself beside her.

Next moment, the coachman, whose portly person was displayed in a rich livery, having received orders from his fellow-servant to go home, dashed along the crowded thoroughfare.

## II.

## CAPTAIN DARCY.

LADY STARKEY'S house was not one of the largest in Berkeley-square, but it was one of the nicest.

On alighting, her ladyship dismissed the brougham, and took Sir John at once to her boudoir, which was the most charming little room imaginable, exquisitely furnished, containing sofas and chairs that could only have come from Paris, adorned with old china, knick-knacks of various kinds, and having some choice cabinet pictures on its walls.

Amongst the latter was a portrait of her fickle spouse, painted by an eminent French artist shortly after their union.

Without a doubt Sir Thomas was strikingly handsome at that period, and Lady Starkey never contemplated his fine features without a touch of tenderness. Some people wondered why her ladyship did not put away that portrait, but it had been taken when Sir Thomas was really devoted to her, and she loved it on that account.

Once upon a time, a portrait of herself, in all the bloom of her beauty, hung beside it. But that portrait was gone.

Leaving the old baronet for a few minutes, she returned and sat down on a sofa beside him.

During the drive back from the bank very little conversation had taken place between them, for she felt unequal to the effort; but she had now, in some degree, regained her composure.

"I thought Sir Thomas looked very well this morning," she remarked. "How say you, Sir John?"

"I perceived very little difference in him," he replied. "But he looked somewhat older."

"I saw no change," said her ladyship. "That portrait might have been painted yesterday. The features are the same, though the expression is somewhat altered."

"I would advise you—as I have often done before—to remove that portrait," he said.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "It is my greatest comfort. It always regards me with the same loving look."

"Which the original has long lost," said Sir John.

"I don't know," she rejoined. "I discerned some traces of the former expression in his countenance to-day."

"Mere fancy. Don't deceive yourself. Don't encourage any feeling of regard for him. It will only lead to further disappointment and distress. Sir Thomas will never return to you; I am certain of that, and it is better you should believe so than indulge any false hopes. Strive to forget him. That's the best advice I can give."

"I only talk about him to you, Sir John."

"I thought your lady's maid was your chief confidante?"

"Yes, I confess, I do talk to Thompson. But she is nobody."

"Pardon me! I am of opinion that Mrs. Thompson has more real influence with you than anyone else."

"You are mistaken, I assure you, dear Sir John. I merely unburden my breast to her. She does not advise me. She soothes me."

"Very much the same thing," observed Sir John, shrugging his shoulders.

"I have had some difficulty lately with my cousin, Lionel Darcy," said Lady Starkey. "He was furiously enraged the other day by something he had heard of Sir Thomas, and declared he would call him to account. But I made him promise to keep quiet."

"Well, I must say your ladyship is the most amiable and forgiving of your sex."

"Not so! I could kill my rival, Mrs. Heyrick. But I would not injure Sir Thomas."

"Strange he should be insensible to your merits. I really don't think Mrs. Heyrick can compare with you."

"I hate her, but I cannot blind myself to her charms," said Lady Starkey. "She is very captivating, and has completely enslaved my husband."

"Yes, there can be no doubt about that. I remember her as Aline Neville, before her marriage with old Heyrick. Then she was thought remarkably attractive, but not half so much so as when she became a rich widow."

"People said at the time that you yourself proposed to her."

"And they spoke the truth; but she had several other offers besides mine. However, she preferred one whom she

could not wed, and who sacrificed an incomparable wife for her sake."

"No more of this, Sir John. I cannot bear the recollection of that time. Never shall I forget the anguish I endured when I first discovered my husband's infidelity. But I did not reproach him."

"If anything could have moved him your forbearance must have done. But he was too much besotted."

"Prayers were of no avail. He was deaf to all my entreaties, and left me, as you are aware. Still, I would not consent to the divorce, which you and other friends proposed, but bore up in the hope that some day the truant would return. I would not absolutely shut the door against him."

"There is not a chance of your fond hopes being realised. You are dealing with an ingrate, who no longer cares for you. Take the step you have been advised. It may be the means of restoring you to happiness."

"I will give him another year. If he has not returned by that time I will act as you recommend."

Just then the footman came in, and said that "Captain Darcy had called. Would her ladyship see him?"

"Certainly," she replied. "I am glad you are here, Sir John. Pray don't leave me."

Sir John nodded, and immediately afterwards Captain Darcy was shown into the room. As he advanced, he laid down his hat and cane.

He was tall, well made, and very handsome, almost as handsome as Sir Thomas Starkey, though in a different style, for the captain had light hair and blonde moustaches, and his eyes were blue. His age could not be more than five and twenty.

His manner now was very easy and agreeable, and it may be said with truth that he was a general favourite. Sir John, who knew him intimately, seemed very glad to see him.

"I have some news for your ladyship, that I am sure will interest you," he said. "I have seen Sir Thomas."

"So have we!" cried both his hearers.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the captain, surprised. "Where, may I ask?"

"At his bankers. Where did you see him?"

"At our club. I had great difficulty in controlling myself, but I wouldn't make a scene, so I didn't go near

him. However, I ascertained from Colonel Ratcliffe that he is living at Dieppe, so I can find him if I choose."

"But I trust you won't go in quest of him? You promised to leave him alone."

"True. But the sight of him has rekindled all my wrath. I should like to give him my opinion of his conduct."

"Perhaps you may think better of him when you learn that he has just presented me with two thousand pounds."

"Unsolicited, I hope," cried Darcy. "You have plenty of money."

"Entirely unsolicited," remarked Sir John. "Her ladyship only learnt what had been done when she called at the bankers."

"Why didn't you refuse the money?" said Captain Darcy, looking rather displeased.

"I shan't keep it myself," said Lady Starkey. "I mean to give it to my niece, Rose Hylton."

"I think her ladyship did quite right," said Sir John. "The best way to punish the offender is to take his money."

"I should like to punish him in another way," said Darcy, with a meaning look.

"Remember your promise, Lionel," said her ladyship. "No challenge, or you will forfeit all my regard."

"You must release me from that promise, *belle cousine*," cried the captain.

"Never," she rejoined. "I will have no fighting on my account. If you disobey me, you will take the consequences."

"You cannot blame my devotion," he said, evasively.

"I am afraid, from your manner, that you do meditate something," she said, with an anxious look. "But I tell you again, it mustn't be. If either of you fell in the encounter, I should ever reproach myself!"

"Don't make yourself uneasy," said Darcy. "You have really nothing to fear."

"I suppose I must be content with that assurance?" she rejoined.

"I could say nothing more were I to talk for an hour. But we won't prolong the conversation. Are you going towards Pall Mall, Sir John?" asked the captain, rising.

The old baronet got up at once, and said he would accompany him.

They then took leave of her ladyship, who had hardly

strength enough to ring the bell, and sank down on the sofa the moment they had quitted the room.

"I am certain Lionel and Sir Thomas will meet," she ejaculated. "And I have, moreover, a presentiment that my husband will be killed. What can I do to prevent the meeting?"

Leaving Lady Starkey to her painful reflections, we will follow the two gentlemen to Pall Mall.

"Now, tell me, Darcy," said Sir John. "Do you really mean to call out Starkey?"

"I shall try. I've found out that he returns to Dieppe to-night, and shall follow to-morrow with Colonel Ratcliffe, who has promised to accompany me. I shall affront him, and he cannot then refuse a meeting."

"Don't be afraid. Starkey is the last man to tolerate an affront. He is as hot-headed as yourself. But mind what you are about. Sir Thomas is a dead shot."

"I must take my chance," said Darcy, carelessly. "I'm not a bad shot myself. But understand me! I don't want to kill him—only to punish him."

"A mere rap on the elbow to make him drop his pistol—eh?"

"And own he has grievously wronged his wife. That he must do."

"Humph! I'm not so sure that he will do it," replied Sir John. "Well, no doubt, you have right and justice on your side, and that's something. Moreover, you'll have an excellent *témoin* in Colonel Ratcliffe. No mistake with him. He's a perfect gentleman. Everything will be well conducted."

"Of that I'm certain," said Darcy, as they stopped before the entrance of the Junior United Service Club. "Won't you come in?"

"No, thankee," replied the old baronet.

"I'd rather not be mixed up in this affair, as I might be. I shall call on Lady Starkey to-morrow. Shall I say anything to her?"

"Tell her all, and entreat her to pardon my disobedience."

Just as they were about to separate, a tall, fine-looking man came out of the club, and descending the steps, shook hands with the old baronet.

"I want Sir John to come in and have some luncheon," said Captain Darcy, "but he declines."

"I've just heard something that has taken away my appetite," said Sir John.

"Nothing wrong, I hope," said the colonel, staring at Darcy.

"Nothing whatever," replied the old baronet. "I hope all may come off well. I'll call a few days hence, and hear all about it."

"Supposing I'm alive at the time," replied Darcy, laughing. And he entered the club with the colonel.

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### III.

#### AT DIEPPE.

NEXT day, late in the afternoon, Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe, who had just crossed in the steamer from Newhaven to Dieppe, and had been favoured with a very swift passage, took the way from the harbour to the Hôtel Royal.

Each had a cigarette between his lips, and they were preceded by a porter carrying their overcoats and valises.

On reaching the hotel, which was not very far off, their first business was to secure a couple of bedrooms, facing the sea, and having sent their scanty luggage upstairs, they ordered dinner at a later hour, and took the opportunity of inquiring of the *garçon* if he knew where Sir Thomas Starkey was to be found?

The information required was readily given. Sir Thomas occupied Bellevue, a very pretty villa close to the town. But they need not go there in search of him, for at this hour, he and madame were certain to be found at the Grand Café, the Casino, or on the *plage*. Sir Thomas had been at the Hotel Royal that very morning to call on his friend, the Comte de Clairvaux, who was staying there, and they had gone out together. Perhaps the gentlemen had heard of the Comte de Clairvaux. He belonged to the *beau monde*, and was an *élégant* of the first rank.

"I have met him in society in London," observed Colonel Ratcliffe. "A very agreeable man, with very polite manners."

"The compte's description exactly," said the *garçon*. "He has come to Dieppe expressly to see his friend, Sir Thomas Starkey. Sir Thomas wished him to stay at the Villa Bellevue, but he preferred having a room here. I feel certain if *ces messieurs* will take a little promenade to the Casino, they will meet them and madame."

"How is madame looking?" asked the colonel.

"*Magnifique*," exclaimed the *garçon*, rapturously. "*Sans aucun doute la plus belle femme de Dieppe*."

"Then you are rather badly off for beauty, it seems," remarked Captain Darcy.

"Pardon, monsieur, we never had so many handsome women in Dieppe as now," rejoined the *garçon*, "and such I am sure will be your opinion when you have looked about you."

"Shall we go forth and reconnoitre?" said the colonel to his friend.

"I was about to propose a stroll," replied Darcy.

Dieppe could not have been seen to greater advantage than on that bright and pleasant afternoon. The picturesque old castle on the cliff overlooking the town, with its tall sugar-loaf towers and bridge, had nothing gloomy about it, and seemed merely built to protect the Casino and the baths on the *plage* beneath.

As it chanced to be market-day, the streets were full of Norman *paysannes* in their tall caps and quaint costumes, and as the *garçon* had asserted, a great many pretty women were to be seen with a vast number of smart attendants; but Captain Darcy could not discover the persons he sought.

However, they were not very far off, and if he had entered the Grand Café, in the main street, instead of the Casino, he would have found them.

There they were—madame and the two gentlemen—seated at a small table in the inner room, chatting gaily, and eating ices.

Certainly, madame's charms had not been exaggerated, and on looking at her no wonder could be felt that she held Sir Thomas in thrall.

Cast in an exquisite mould, her delicate features were lighted up by eyes of tenderest blue. Her complexion was ravishingly fair, and her tresses golden. Her figure was slight and graceful, and the pretty sea-side costume she had adopted suited her admirably.

With Sir Thomas's appearance we are already familiar, so we need not describe him. But he certainly looked more at ease than he did at the bank in the Strand.

The Compte de Clairvaux was a very brilliant personage, and had an air of great distinction.

Though he could not be called young, he was remarkably well-preserved. Not a single grey hair could be detected amid his dark and still luxuriant locks, and no lorgnon, hanging from his neck, proclaimed that his sight was failing him. He was slightly inclined to *embonpoint*—but no one thought him too stout—and was attired in the last Paris fashion.

But it was the compte's manner that chiefly excited admiration. So easy and agreeable was he, that all with whom he came in contact were charmed. Faults he had, no doubt; but people were so fascinated by his manner that they entirely overlooked them.

Sir Thomas Starkey, we need scarcely say, liked him exceedingly, and often consulted him when he wanted advice. It was at his suggestion that Sir Thomas had first paid over the large sum we have mentioned to Lady Starkey. The compte thought it the proper thing to do, and Sir Thomas agreed with him and did it.

"I'm sure you must feel better satisfied with yourself, *mon cher*, since you have made her ladyship this pretty present, than when you took no notice of her," said the count. "She cannot now complain that you give her nothing."

"She has a larger income than I have myself," rejoined Sir Thomas; and I have left her in undisturbed enjoyment of it. It is not my fault, as you are aware, that the bonds that tie us together are not broken."

"No, no—I know that—and think her very foolish—very foolish indeed. But as you are still linked together, and likely to remain so, you are bound to show her every consideration—particularly as you have experienced no annoyance from her."

"We know why her ladyship won't separate from Sir Thomas," said madame.

"She is influenced by mixed feelings," rejoined the compte. "Jealousy of you, and attachment to her husband."

"She is very provoking," cried madame. "Can't we force her to separate?"

"I'm afraid not, dearest Aline," said Sir Thomas. "She won't come to any terms. But her patience must be worn out in time, when she finds I won't leave you."

"Leave me!" she exclaimed, looking at him. "That could never be."

"Don't alarm yourself, dearest Aline. The passion I felt for you from the first is entirely unabated. The count can bear witness——"

"That you rave about her continually—I am sure you were wretched when you went to London, though you were scarcely absent a couple of days."

"You are right, *mon ami*, I was miserable; and never more enchanted than when I got back again."

"Well, I hope nothing will occur to disturb your happiness," said the count.

"Nothing is likely to do so," cried Aline. "We only live for each other."

At this moment two tall personages—evidently Englishmen—entered the *café* and looked around.

"There he is," said the foremost to his companion. "We have found him at last."

"And madame as well," replied the other. "That is the *Compte de Clairvaux* with them."

"By Jove! that's lucky," said Darcy. "Perhaps, he may act as Sir Thomas's second."

"Not unlikely," replied the colonel. "What will you do? You won't go into that room, I suppose? Shall I ask Sir Thomas to step out and speak to you?"

"That will be the best plan. The place is clear. Everybody is outside just now."

The entrance of the new-comers had not passed unnoticed by those in the inner room. Sir Thomas recognised them both, and wondered how they came there; Aline felt alarmed, she knew not why; and the *Compte de Clairvaux* regarded them with a certain curiosity, for he remembered having met Colonel Ratcliffe in London.

But all were surprised when the colonel entered the room, and bowing to the party, addressed Sir Thomas.

"Captain Darcy wishes to have a word with you, Sir Thomas," he said.

"Excuse me for a moment, *compte*," replied Starkey, rising.

## IV.

## THE CHALLENGE.

DARCY, who had moved on one side, bowed stiffly as Sir Thomas came up.

"You may possibly guess what has brought me here, Sir Thomas?" he said, in a low, stern voice. "You must have heard my opinion of your treatment of my cousin—your much injured wife. I have come to call you to account."

For a moment Sir Thomas looked surprised, but the expression of his countenance quickly became as menacing and haughty as that of Darcy himself.

"I do not see what right you have to demand an account from me, sir," he said.

"I am your wife's nearest male relation," replied Darcy; "and her wrongs have touched me deeply. Do not force me to give you my opinion of your conduct, and tell you in Colonel Ratcliffe's presence what I think of you!"

"You have said quite enough," rejoined Sir Thomas, with difficulty repressing his anger. "I will not disappoint you. We will settle the matter as soon as you please."

"Let it be to-morrow morning, then, at an early hour," said Darcy. "Shall we meet here—at Dieppe?"

"It will suit me better than elsewhere," replied Sir Thomas. "We can easily find a suitable spot on the road to the Château d'Arques. Pistols, of course."

"Of course," replied Darcy, "you will have already conjectured that my friend, Colonel Ratcliffe, will act for me?"

Sir Thomas bowed to the colonel.

"I have a friend with me here—the Comte de Clairvaux—on whom I can rely," he said.

"I have the honour of knowing the count," observed the colonel, "and shall be well pleased to act with him."

Just then the count came from the inner room, and saluted the new-comers.

"Pardon my interruption," he said to Sir Thomas. "I am sent to see what you are about."

"You are come most *à propos*," replied the other, hastily explaining what had occurred.

"I feared something had happened," said the count, "and so did madame. Of course, you may command my services. But is it too late for an amicable arrangement? If Colonel Ratcliffe will lend his aid, I shall be delighted to assist."

"The attempt would be quite useless, count," replied the colonel, glancing at his principal, and receiving no encouragement. "The affair *must* go on. We can meet by-and-by at the Hotel Royal, where we know you are staying."

Formally saluting Sir Thomas and his friend, the two officers departed.

Sir Thomas then flew to madame, who sprang to meet him.

"For Heaven's sake what has happened?" she cried. "Don't attempt to deceive me! I must, and will, know the truth. Those two officers were Colonel Ratcliffe and Captain Darcy. I recognised them at once. Darcy has come to challenge you, I am certain."

"I cannot contradict you," replied Sir Thomas, trying to force a smile.

"Have you accepted the challenge?" she cried.

"Ask the count," he rejoined.

"Sir Thomas could not do otherwise, madame," said De Clairvaux. "He could not refuse."

"If he is killed, as he may be, I shall die!" she exclaimed.

"Pooh!" cried Sir Thomas, endeavouring to laugh the matter off. "Duels are never fatal now-a-days. We shall meet and have a shot at each other, that's all!"

"Perhaps a trifling hurt, nothing more," added the count.

"I wish I could think so," said Aline. "But I have a great misgiving."

"I myself have fought three duels, madame," remarked the count, "and have never yet killed an adversary nor got wounded myself."

"You have been lucky indeed, count," cried Aline. "I hope Sir Thomas may be equally lucky to-morrow."

"Doubt it not, madame," said the count.

"We must now go home," said Sir Thomas. "I have a few things to arrange."

"I will follow these gentlemen to the Hotel Royal," said the count, "and will come to you afterwards."

"Good," replied Sir Thomas.

And they quitted the *café*.

## V.

## A L I N E.

SIR THOMAS STARKEY kept a very good establishment at the Villa Bellevue, all his household being French. The *chef de cuisine* was an artist in his way.

Though hired, there was not a handsomer carriage in Dieppe, nor a finer pair of horses than those driven by Sir Thomas.

Madame had a very pretty *femme de chambre*, named Georgette, who was devoted to her, and thought her perfect.

As the Villa Bellevue was charmingly furnished, its occupants had everything they could desire, and ought to have been exceedingly comfortable.

On their return from the promenade, which had ended so disagreeably, Louis, the valet, received them, and noticed that his master looked unusually grave and preoccupied, but did not venture a remark.

Proceeding at once to the salon, Sir Thomas flung himself into a *fauteuil*, and madame, fancying he wished to be alone for a short time, left him, and went to her *cabinet de toilette*, where she found Georgette.

"Madame has not her usual smile," said the pretty *femme de chambre*, regarding her anxiously. "I hope nothing has occurred to disturb her."

"Yes, a great deal has occurred, Georgette," replied her mistress, seating herself. "I have been very much agitated. Give me some eau de Cologne."

Georgette hastened to obey the order.

"May I venture to inquire what has happened, madame?" she asked, with an increased appearance of solicitude, as she steeped her mistress's handkerchief in the spirit.

"Something terrible has happened, Georgette. I am sure you will sympathise with me and pity me."

"What is it, in Heaven's name, madame?"

But her mistress could not reply, being half suffocated by emotion.

Georgette had never before seen her so much moved, and was quite frightened.

By-and-by her mistress partially recovered.

"What will you say, Georgette," she cried in broken accents, "when I tell you Sir Thomas is about to fight a duel?"

"*Mon Dieu!* is it only that?" exclaimed the *femme de chambre*, who had anticipated something far more dreadful. "Be of good courage, madame. I have no fear for my master. Sir Thomas is a very gallant gentleman. He is sure to kill his adversary."

"I hope your words may come true, Georgette."

"Do not doubt it, madame; I never yet saw the man likely to prove a match for Sir Thomas."

"I have no doubt of Sir Thomas's courage and skill. But fortune may declare against him."

"Fortune always declares for the brave, madame. You will welcome him back a victor. May I ask when the duel takes place?"

"To-morrow morning early."

"Then my first prayer to the Virgin shall be for him, madame; and doubt not you will have good news."

"You give me fresh spirits, Georgette," cried her mistress. "I will now go to Sir Thomas."

"First, allow me to arrange your toilette a little, madame."

This done, Aline descended to the salon, where she found Sir Thomas in the act of folding up a letter.

"Am I interrupting you?" she asked.

"No, I have just done," he replied, putting the letter into his breast pocket.

"May I ask to whom you have been writing?" she said.

"I can't tell you," he replied. "But the letter will never be delivered, unless I fall. Come and sit down by me," he added, placing a chair opposite him, and taking her hands in his own.

For a few minutes they gazed at each other in silence; their breasts filled with unutterable thoughts.

At last Sir Thomas spoke, in a low, tender voice.

"Heaven cannot—will not—part two beings so devoted to each other as we are," he murmured.

"Oh! no—no—no!" she cried. "Many years of happiness, I doubt not, are in store for us."

"I only wish we were wedded, dearest Aline," he said. "My breast would then be lightened, and a dying pang spared me."

"You will escape that pang, dear Sir Thomas," she cried, clasping his hand to her heart. "I am sure you will. I should not be able to sit here, if I did not believe so."

"No doubt, I deserve some punishment," he continued, in a very grave tone; "and, unless I am mercifully dealt with, I shall not escape it."

"You terrify me, dear Sir Thomas," she cried. "I never heard you talk thus before."

"Gloomy thoughts rush upon me unbidden," he rejoined, "and I must perforce give utterance to them. What has brought this hot-headed fellow here? Personally, I have given him no offence. Nor is there any reason why he should espouse Lady Starkey's cause. Yet he comes here on a sudden, to challenge me to mortal combat, and I cannot avoid him."

"You are not forced to meet him."

"As a man of honour, I am bound to accept his challenge, and give him a chance of taking my life."

"Still, you might have refused to fight."

"True, but I should have despised myself had I done so. No; I had no option. But it does seem hard—desperately hard—to leave one I love best in the world, and forfeit all the enjoyments of life, merely because a quarrelsome fool like Captain Darcy is displeased with my conduct, and chooses to constitute himself his cousin's champion."

"I believe he is in love with her himself," said madame, "and wants to get rid of you. Disappoint him."

"I will, if I can, depend upon it."

"Have no consideration for him. He has sought this encounter; let him take the consequences. In my opinion, you grant him too much in giving him a chance of shooting you. But don't let him carry out his design."

"He shall not! He shall not!" cried Sir Thomas, springing to his feet with a changed expression of countenance. "You have roused me."

"I am glad of it," she rejoined. "Keep as you are now, and all will be well."

"I must go and look at my pistols," he said. "I have not seen them for a month. I fancied I should have no further use for them, but you see how one may be mistaken. The case is in my dressing-room. Come with me?"

"On no account," she replied, with a shudder.

"They will prove my protection," laughed Sir Thomas, as he quitted the room.

When he returned, in a few minutes, he found the *Compte de Clairvaux* with madame.

"Well, I have been to the *Hotel Royal*, and have arranged all with Colonel Ratcliffe," he said; according to French rules, you ought to have two *témoins* each; but in your case, one each may suffice. You are to meet at six to-morrow morning at a convenient spot about two miles from Dieppe on the road to the *Château d'Arques*."

Sir Thomas expressed his approval of the arrangement.

"To prevent any mistake," pursued the count, "the colonel and myself have agreed that our respective carriages shall set out for the place of rendezvous at the same time. We are to go first, and if you see no objection, can take the surgeon with us."

"All right," said Sir Thomas.

"We shall hope to be back again long before madame comes down to breakfast," said the count.

"I trust to see you safe and sound," she replied, looking very pale, but maintaining her composure.

"Since all is settled," said Sir Thomas, "let us dismiss the matter altogether. What say you to a drive before dinner, count? I am sure madame will not object."

"On the contrary, I very much approve," she replied. "The evening is fine, so we can take a long drive, and dine late."

The count was charmed with the proposal, which just suited him. Accordingly, the *calèche* was ordered, and was very soon at the door. It was a very smart turn-out, and would have done no discredit to Hyde Park.

They took the road to the *Château d'Arques*, and when about half-way there the count spoke to the coachman, and bade him mark the spot, as he would have to bring his master and himself there next morning at six o'clock.

Grégoire, the coachman, touched his hat, promising strict attention to the order.

No need to fix the spot on his memory, for he knew it well and had often halted there to allow those whom he conducted to walk on the smooth, level turf.

Close to the road was an old oak of great size, and at the other side of the plain rose a mound, which visitors usually ascended.

As will be seen, it was a convenient place of rendezvous for the meeting on the morrow.

"Can you guess why the gentlemen are coming out so early in the morning, Baptiste?" observed the coachman, in a low tone, to the groom. "If not, I'll tell you. Our master, Sir Thomas, is about to fight a duel."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Baptiste.

"I'm certain of it," said the other. "And the Comte de Clairvaux is to be his *témoin*."

"Very likely you're right, Grégoire. If such should be the case, I hope they'll bring me with them. I should like, of all things, to witness a duel."

"Provided no harm ensues," observed the coachman.

"That's understood," rejoined the other.

After spending half an hour very agreeably at the Château d'Arques, where they found several English and American ladies and their attendants examining the picturesque ruins, and admiring the charming view of the Valley of the Bethune, they returned.

While passing the little plain, bordered by the old oak, and distinguished by the mound, Aline became very pale, and had great difficulty in repressing her emotion.

But by the time they reached the Villa Bellevue, she had regained her composure.

A capital dinner, that did great credit to the *chef*, awaited them. Sir Thomas seemed in unusually good spirits, but Aline thought his gaiety assumed.

The Comte de Clairvaux didn't stay late, but had a few words in private with Sir Thomas before his departure.

"The carriage will come to the Hotel Royal for you soon after five in the morning," said Sir Thomas, as he shook hands with him. "*Au revoir!*"

The count returned for a moment to say good night to madame.

"We shall meet at breakfast to-morrow morning," he said, as he took leave of her.

Sir Thomas had previously given some directions respecting the surgeon to Louis, and the valet now informed him that his wishes would be attended to.

"Grégoire is without, Sir Thomas," continued Louis, "and desires to know whether you have any further commands for him."

"To prevent mistake, I will repeat my orders," said Sir Thomas. "At five o'clock, he is to take the *calèche* to the Hotel Royal, and wait for the Comte de Clairvaux, with whom

he will return here. By that time, no doubt, the surgeon will have arrived, and I myself shall be ready to set out. You will call me at five o'clock."

One question more, which the valet ventured to put. Was he to accompany his master?

"No; you will remain here to attend upon madame, in case she should require your services," replied Sir Thomas. "Baptiste will go with the coachman."

Greatly disappointed, Louis withdrew.

"Just then, madame, who had left the salon for a short time, returned.

"Have you anything more to say to me, Sir Thomas?" she inquired.

"Yes; something rather important," he replied; "and I must mention it now. Perhaps the subject may not be pleasant," he added, taking her hand, and holding it in his own, as he went on; "but you must bear with me. You know that my nearest male relative is Stanley Brereton, my sister's son."

"I have never seen your nephew, Stanley Brereton, though I have much wished to meet him. But you have often told me he is very handsome, and a favourite of yours."

"I used to see a great deal of him at one time; but of late—owing to circumstances—a coolness has taken place between myself and my sister, Mrs. Brereton, and we have not met—not even corresponded."

"I fear I am the cause of the estrangement."

"Never mind. Mrs. Brereton, you are aware, is a widow. Her husband, who was a clergyman, and had a small living in Cheshire, died several years ago, and left her rather poorly off. I used to make her an allowance, but it has been discontinued of late."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Aline. "She will attribute the change to me."

"Stanley, I am informed, resents my conduct to his mother, and says I have behaved very badly. If I have, I intend to make reparation. I have left a thousand a year to my sister, and the rest of my property to her son."

"You have done quite right," said Aline, approvingly.

"I have not mentioned you in my will, which has been made quite recently, but you will understand my motive," continued Sir Thomas. "You have plenty of money."

"Plenty!" she cried. "I don't want more. Neither does your wife, for she has a good fortune of her own."

"She must be content with the sum I have just given her," said Sir Thomas. "She will get no more from me. This is what I wished to tell you, dearest Aline. In case of my death, Stanley Brereton will be my heir, but he won't succeed to the baronetcy, since he is not in the patent. I am glad you approve of what I have done, for I believe it is for the best."

"I think so too," she replied, regarding him earnestly. "But you seem to have a strong presentiment of ill."

"If I fall to-morrow, I shall not die unprepared," he replied.

"Now listen to *me*," said Aline. "Should your fears be realised, I shall retire from the world, and pass the remainder of my days in a religious retreat."

"You must not think of such a thing, dearest Aline. You are young, beautiful, rich. You will repent the step."

"I will take it," she cried, in a resolute tone. "Not all you can say will dissuade me. But I trust I may be spared the trial."

"I did not think you loved me so much!" he said; "but you ought not to make such a sacrifice for me."

"What should I have to live for, if you were gone?" she cried, flinging her arms round his neck.

Sir Thomas could make no reply, but strained her to his breast.

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## VI.

### THE DUEL.

NEXT morning at five o'clock, Louis came to call his master.

But Sir Thomas had long been astir, and had nearly completed his toilette.

Moreover, he had written a couple of letters, respectively addressed to his sister, Mrs. Brereton, and his nephew, Stanley.

Both these letters were sealed with black wax, and laid on a small table.

Sir Thomas pointed them out to the valet, telling him they were not to be posted till his return.

Louis seemed to comprehend his master's meaning, but he made no remark.

The letter written by Sir Thomas on the previous afternoon had been put by him in a drawer, but he now replaced it in his breast pocket.

After addressing a brief prayer to Heaven he quitted the room, taking nothing with him, for he had already entrusted his *fourreau des pistolets* to Louis.

On stepping forth upon the landing, he was quite surprised to find Aline waiting for him.

Wrapped in a *peignoir*, she looked as if she had not slept during the night.

"Why have you disturbed yourself?" he cried, embracing her.

"I wanted to see you before you set out on your terrible errand," she rejoined, regarding him tenderly.

"Don't call it a terrible errand!" he cried. "I shall come back quite safely. I have no misgivings whatever. But do not let us prolong the interview."

And printing a kiss on her brow, he hastened down the staircase.

He was not aware that Georgette had been watching him from the partly opened door of her mistress's room.

"Success attend him!" cried the *femme de chambre*, now coming forth. "I am delighted to have seen him. He looks very well."

"You must now finish dressing me as quickly as you can, Georgette," said her mistress, returning to her room.

"Then madame keeps to her design, and means to be present at the meeting?" said the *femme de chambre*.

"I mean to witness it," replied Aline. "You have told Louis to order another carriage?"

"I have given him exact orders, madame, and he is sure to attend to them. The second carriage will be here as soon as the first is gone. But what will Sir Thomas say to this step, madame? Have you reflected?"

"I'm afraid he'll be very angry. But I must go."

The *femme de chambre* shrugged her shoulders, and feeling that remonstrances would be useless, she followed her mistress into the dressing-room, where she quickly completed her early toilette.

Just then, the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and looking from the window of the apartment, which commanded the drive to the villa, they beheld the *calèche* with the Comte de Clairvaux seated in it. He was presently joined by Sir Thomas and the surgeon, M. Martin.

The latter was an intelligent-looking young man, and had a case of instruments under his arm.

He got in first, and sat with his back to the horses.

Sir Thomas followed, bringing the pistol-case with him. He shook hands with the count, who looked in very good spirits, and introduced the surgeon to him.

Having shut the carriage door, Baptiste sprang to the side of the coachman, who instantly drove off.

"Well, I have my wish," observed the groom to his companion.

"True," replied the other, "but I suspect Louis will be there as well."

Baptiste wanted to know something more, but the coachman did not care to enlighten him.

As soon as the *calèche* had started, Aline descended to the salon followed by Georgette.

They had not to wait long before Louis entered to say that the *coupé* had arrived. Madame quickly took her place in it, and was followed by Georgette.

Louis went with them, though he was afraid Sir Thomas would blame him, if he found out what had been done.

They had not gone far when they descried two carriages in advance,—the first evidently containing Sir Thomas and his friends, and the second—a landau—being occupied by Colonel Ratcliffe and Captain Darcy.

Louis took care to keep at a respectful distance from these vehicles.

The morning was exceedingly beautiful, and the view of Dieppe with its old castle, as beheld from many points, with the sea spreading out before it, and glittering in the early sunbeams, formed a lovely prospect.

Aline was in no mood to enjoy the fair scene; but Georgette could not contain herself, and uttered frequent exclamations of delight. Even the screaming of the sea-gulls sounded like music in her ears.

Ere long the *coupé* stopped, and Louis presented himself at the window.

"My master's carriage has arrived at the place of rendez-

vous, madame," he said, "and has entered the ground. The landau is about to follow. What shall we do? The coachman thinks we had better stop at the old oak."

"Bid him choose his own place," replied madame; but he must be careful to keep out of sight."

The *coupé* then went on with its deeply-excited occupants, and was soon behind the huge old tree, which partially sheltered it from view.

But this position did not suit Aline. She could not distinguish what was going on, for the occupants of the other carriages had alighted and were walking to the further side of the plain. Calling to Louis to open the door, she got out, and was followed by Georgette.

By this time the poor lady was scarcely under self-control, and paying no heed to anything said to her, she hurried off towards the intending combatants, and must infallibly have betrayed herself, if Georgette had not seized her arm, and restrained her.

"For Heaven's sake, stop, madame?" cried the latter. "Sir Thomas will be distracted at the sight of you, and will never be able to take aim properly."

Thus conjured, Aline obeyed.

Luckily, all concerned in the approaching conflict were too much interested in it to notice her. Even their attendants had eyes for nothing else.

On alighting from his carriage, Sir Thomas, after a brief consultation with the Comte de Clairvaux, moved to the further side of the plain. They were accompanied by the surgeon, who walked a little behind them.

The count had taken possession of the pistol-case, having been informed that the arms within it were ready for use. Nothing had to be done but take them out of the box.

Sir Thomas looked perfectly calm, and had conversed quite cheerfully during the drive to the ground.

"Have you any directions to give me, *mon cher ami*?" asked the count as they stopped. "Any message to convey to madame?"

"Yes, there is a letter here," he replied, touching his breast, "which I wish to be delivered to her, in case I cannot take it back with me."

"I will give it to her myself," replied the count. "That I promise you."

By this time Captain Darcy and his friend had like-

wise alighted, and were making their way towards the spot.

A groom, who attended them, followed close behind with a case of pistols.

On approaching, Darcy, who looked very well, and totally free from uneasiness, courteously saluted his adversary, who bowed in return.

Salutations were likewise exchanged by the seconds, after which a momentary conference took place between them.

"The quarrel cannot be arranged, I find, gentlemen," said the colonel. "The duel must go on."

"Certainly. We have not come here merely for a drive," replied Sir Thomas. "Let there be no needless delay," he added to the colonel.

"There shall be none," replied the other. "We are as anxious to get the business settled as soon as you can be."

In another minute the pistols were produced, and each man was furnished with a weapon that had previously been carefully examined.

The ground was next measured, and the parties placed at the proper distance.

While this was going on, the intending combatants watched each other narrowly, but neither could discern any traces of misgiving in his opponent.

It may be that Captain Darcy treated the affair more lightly than Sir Thomas. But the seconds did not think he had the best chance.

On the contrary, they deemed it highly probable that his stern-looking antagonist would shoot him.

Next minute, the signal was given. Both parties fired simultaneously.

At first it was thought neither was hit. But after maintaining his erect position for a brief space, Sir Thomas fell backwards to the ground.

The count and the surgeon were hastening to his assistance, when a loud shriek was heard, and a half-distracted lady rushed to the spot and flung herself down beside him.

"Sir Thomas! dearest Sir Thomas!" she cried, slightly raising his head. "Look at me! 'tis I!—'tis Aline!"

At the sound of that voice the wounded man opened his eyes, and a scarcely-perceptible smile lighted up his deathly features, but he could not speak.

The surgeon now came up, and tore up his shirt, which was stained with blood that oozed from a wound in the left breast.

"Is the wound mortal?" cried Aline, looking on with terror.

"I hope not, madame," replied the surgeon, not daring to tell her the truth.

"Don't attempt to deceive me!" she cried. "I know it is. Can you give him any restorative? He wishes to say something to me."

"It would be useless to offer him a restorative, madame," replied the surgeon, "he could not swallow it."

The dying man now made a last effort to speak, but could only give utterance to the sad word, "Farewell!"

Sinking backwards, he then expired.

Aline looked the picture of anguish and despair, but did not faint.

Seeing what had happened, Georgette, who had remained at a little distance, now flew to the spot, and aided the surgeon to render assistance to the unhappy lady.

The *Compte de Clairvaux* likewise joined the little group round the body.

"Is my dear friend, Sir Thomas, really gone?" he inquired of the surgeon, in accents of deepest concern.

"Alas! Yes, *Monsieur le Compte*," replied the other in a low voice. "And I am very much afraid of the effect of the scene upon madame. We must get her away from this place as quickly as we can."

"'Tis a great pity she came here," muttered the count.

"'Twas her love for Sir Thomas that brought her," said Georgette. "Pray, don't blame her, *Monsieur le Compte*!"

Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, Aline seemed in some degree to recover her strength.

Bidding the surgeon and Georgette retire, she knelt down and prayed fervently—most fervently—for the soul of him who had just departed.

Her prayer finished, she said in low earnest tones:

"Hear me, gracious Heaven! I register a vow to retire altogether from the world, and devote the remainder of my life to acts of piety and devotion."

She then kissed the dead man's cheek, and bade him an eternal farewell. The count, who had waited for the fitting moment, now prayed her to let him take her to her carriage.

She thanked him, and was moving slowly away when Captain Darcy, who, with Colonel Ratcliffe, had been watching the touching scene, approached, and said in accents of apparently deep sympathy :

"Do not blame me too severely, madame, but accept my solemn assurance that I did not mean to kill Sir Thomas."

Aline regarded him scornfully and incredulously.

"Go back and tell your cousin what you have done," she said. "No doubt she will thank you."

"You are mistaken, madame," replied Darcy. "Lady Starkey did not wish me to fight this duel, and would have prevented me, if she could. She will be greatly shocked at the result."

"I refuse to believe it," replied Aline, departing slowly with the count.

They were followed closely by Georgette, who was ready to assist her mistress in case of necessity.

The poor lady made no reply to the words of consolation offered her by the count, but thanked him earnestly as he placed her in the *coupé*, praying him to return to the ground and see that all needful was done for his unfortunate friend.

"Doubt it not, madame," he replied. "I will bring him myself to the Villa Bellevue."

He then hastened back.

Louis, who had been greatly shocked by the tidings of the tragic event, placed Georgette beside her unhappy mistress, mounted the box, and ordered the coachman to drive home.

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## VII.

### HOW SIR THOMAS STARKEY'S LAST LETTER WAS DELIVERED.

THE pretty villa, usually so gay, seemed entirely changed, as its afflicted mistress drove up to the door.

During the drive back, she had neither spoken a word nor shed a tear, but her fixed expression of countenance greatly alarmed Georgette, who would far rather have seen her indulge in a passionate outburst of grief than continue in this state.

But if the exterior of the house looked gloomy in Aline's eyes, the interior seemed far more so.

She entered the pleasant salon, where she was accustomed to sit with Sir Thomas, and where everything reminded her of him; and after taking a few steps within the room, stood still, looking the very picture of despair.

"Be comforted, dearest madame!—pray be comforted!" said Georgette, who had followed her.

"Talk not to me of comfort, Georgette," she exclaimed, in accents of bitterest distress. "I have lost him! He has gone from me for ever. Never again shall I behold him in the chair where he used to sit!" she added, springing towards it, "Never! never!"

Almost overcome herself, Georgette made another effort to console her mistress.

"Try not to think of him, madame!" she cried, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the other. "I shall never cease to think of him. I shall always look for him in this room."

"Yes, I feel it will always be associated with him, madame. But pray leave it now!"

Aline yielded to her attendant's entreaties, and went upstairs.

Sinking down upon a couch, she remained almost in a state of insensibility, till she was roused by sounds that she could not misunderstand.

Evidently the body of Sir Thomas was being carried to the adjoining chamber.

She rose, but did not go forth, dreading the effect of the painful spectacle upon her, when Georgette entered with a letter in her hand.

"The Compte de Clairvaux has brought you this letter, madame," said the attendant.

"It is from Sir Thomas!" cried Aline. "I saw him folding up the letter, but was not aware it was meant for me."

"The compte bade me say that he took it himself from his unfortunate friend's breast," said Georgette. "Madame will see it is stained with blood."

"Sir Thomas's life-blood," cried Aline, scarcely daring to touch the missive.

At last she summoned up all her resolution and opened the letter.

"Shall I leave the room, madame?" asked Georgette.

"No; remain with me," rejoined her mistress.

For some moments her sight failed her, but at last she read as follows:

"This letter is to bid you an eternal farewell, dearest Aline.

"Unless all is over with me, it will never be delivered to you. I have not much to say, but coming from me when I can no longer give utterance to them you may value these professions of regard.

"I have loved you dearly, Aline, very dearly—with a strength of affection that I did not think I possessed. My sole regret is that we could not be united. This deprivation does not seem to have troubled you so much as it has troubled me. But I have felt it keenly, and never more keenly than at the present moment, when the thought of quitting you for ever forces itself upon me.

"I do not expect an impossibility, I do not ask you to be faithful to my memory. Act as your heart and feelings dictate. You will then act rightly.

"Never again, I am well assured, can you meet with love like mine—fervent, enduring, increasing.

"But you are sure to meet with another lover, who, if he should not have an idolatrous passion for you, like mine, may still be worthy of your regard.

"I would not have you quit the world, as you have sometimes declared you would—if I were gone. I would have you live as other women live.

"Think of me sometimes, dearest Aline. Think of the happy days we have passed together. But do not weep for me, or if you must weep, let your tears be dried quickly, and smiles return to that bright countenance, on which I have loved to gaze.

"FAREWELL! FOR EVER!"

When Aline had finished reading the letter, she dropped it, and her emotion was so great that Georgette fearing that she might faint, advanced to support her, and at the same time picked up the letter, which she offered to her mistress.

"Keep it for me!" cried Aline. "It must have a place next my heart."

"Will madame enter the next chamber?" asked Georgette.

"No one is there, except——"

"I understand," replied Aline, shuddering. "Make sure he is alone, and I will go."

Georgette disappeared, and presently returned, saying that madame could indulge her sorrow unobserved.

On receiving this assurance, Aline went into the adjoining chamber, the door of which had been left open.

Stretched on the couch, she beheld the lifeless body of him she had loved so dearly.

The fine features of the dead man bore no traces of pain, but had a perfectly calm expression. He might have been asleep.

It must have been a delusion, but as Aline bent over him, she fancied he smiled.

"Look! look! Georgette!" she cried. "He smiles upon me, as he used to do in life. Look at him!"

Georgette obeyed, but could discern nothing but the moveless features of the dead.

"I think he is about to speak to me," continued Aline, still gazing at him.

"Do not deceive yourself, madame," said her attendant. "You will never again hear the sound of his voice."

"I am not sure," replied the bewildered lady, with a look that alarmed Georgette. "Speak to me, dear Sir Thomas!—speak to me!"

"She hung over his lips, as if in expectation of some response, but none came.

Georgette now became seriously alarmed, and regretted having brought her mistress into the chamber.

"Come with me, madame!" she cried. "You must not stay longer here."

But Aline refused to stir.

"You shall not bear me from my beloved," she cried. "I *will* remain here."

Georgette feared she might be obliged to use force, when the *Compte de Clairvaux* entered the chamber. Seeing at a glance how matters stood, he stepped up to the distracted lady, and said:

"Allow me to take you hence, madame."

Strange to say, Aline made no resistance now, but took the arm he offered her, and accompanied him to the adjoining chamber.

Georgette followed them.

Placing her on a couch with the greatest attention, the count whispered to Georgette as he quitted the room, "Her reason depends upon the care you take of her. Fortunately, M. Martin, the surgeon, is here. I will send him up to her at once."

"Be sure I will watch her most attentively, Monsieur le Comte," replied Georgette, sobbing. "She is as dear to me as my life."

"Presently, M. Martin appeared, and after a brief examination of the unhappy lady, directed Georgette to put her to bed without delay.

On quitting the room he found the Comte de Clairvaux on the staircase, who inquired most anxiously what he thought of the poor lady's state.

"I cannot give a precise opinion as yet," replied the surgeon. "But I very much fear she will lose her senses. That letter seems to have produced a terrible effect upon her."

"You alarm me greatly," cried the count. "If your fears are unhappily realised, I shall always blame myself for giving her the letter."

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## VIII.

### BRERETON HALL.

LET us now repair to Brereton Hall, one of the many old timber-and-plaster mansions yet to be found in Cheshire and Lancashire.

This ancient house, with which many curious traditions were connected, and which had been successively inhabited by representatives of the Masseys, the Stanleys, and the Breretons, had been sadly neglected of late years, and though not positively in a ruinous state, was the next thing to it.

More than half the rooms were stripped of their furniture and shut up, while those occupied by the present inmates had been partially dismantled.

Still, the great banqueting-hall was hung with tapestry—comewhat faded, it is true. Still, the latticed bay windows

glowed with painted glass. Still, the magnificent oak staircase, of Elizabeth's time, mounted from the entrance-hall to the upper chambers. Still, some exquisitely carved oak furniture was left—together with a few old portraits of the Breretons; but the large library had been completely robbed of its treasures.

A general air of neglect pervaded the fine old place, and seemed to intimate very plainly that its occupants were too poor to keep it up.

The garden surrounding the ancient mansion seemed equally neglected.

Formerly it had boasted beautifully clipped alleys and trim walks, with a smooth and delightful bowling-green, but now the latter was seldom mown, and the alleys were no longer trim.

It seemed a pity that the old hall was not sold—and sold it would have been, but there happened to be a defect in the title.

Two days after the tragic event just recorded took place at Dieppe, a very fine-looking young man and a middle-aged dame were seated at breakfast in the deep recess formed by one of the bay windows we have alluded to.

The lady's features, which bore a strong family likeness to those of the ill-fated Sir Thomas Starkey, had a melancholy expression, and her sombre attire proclaimed her a widow.

She was, in fact, Mrs. Brereton, and the young man with her was her son Stanley. He was habited in a dark grey tweed suit, which suited him exceedingly well.

Stanley Brereton, whose fortunes did not look very promising at home, had recently resolved to go out to Australia, in spite of the remonstrances of his mother, who could not bear to part with him; and they had been talking over the matter, as they usually did, at breakfast.

But on this occasion the young man declared that he had quite made up his mind—that no entreaties should move him and that next day he meant to go up to London and take a passage to Melbourne in one of the royal mail steamships.

"Then you are quite determined to leave me, dearest boy?" said his mother, regarding him with tearful eyes.

"What good should I do by staying here?" he rejoined. "You ought to be glad to get rid of me."

"Oh! don't say that!" she exclaimed. "You are the sole comfort of my life."

"Then come with me to Melbourne!" he cried. "You can go by the Orient Line—splendid steamships! Ha!"

"No! no! I should like to go with you, but I daren't take such a long voyage. Besides, what should I do when I got to Melbourne?"

"Oh, we'll find plenty to do, I can promise you. If not, we'll go to the Bush."

"Well, defer your design for a month, and meantime I'll make a strong effort with your uncle, Sir Thomas."

"It won't answer, depend upon it. He'll do nothing for us. By-the-by, I had a strange dream about him last night, Shall I tell it you?"

"I don't care for dreams in a general way. But perhaps this may interest me!"

"At all events, it's curious. I thought I saw my uncle lying on the ground in a dying state."

"Dying! Oh, dear me!"

"Yes; he had been shot in a duel, as it seemed to me, for several persons were standing near him, and amongst them was a lady, who, I fancied, was the belle Aline, of whom we have heard so much."

"That horrid creature seems always associated with Sir Thomas. Is your dream ended?"

"No. I thought Sir Thomas died of his wound."

"Good gracious! I hope not," exclaimed Mrs. Brereton. "I don't like your dream at all, Stanley."

"But surely you have no belief in it?"

"Not exactly belief—but it makes me feel extremely uneasy."

"Then I'm sorry I related it to you. But here comes old Minshull with some letters. They'll help to change the topic."

As he spoke an old and very respectable man-servant, habited in black, marched slowly towards them, and laid down a couple of letters on the table.

"What's this?" exclaimed Stanley, in amazement, taking up one of the letters, the cover of which was edged with black, and addressed to himself. "My uncle's handwriting."

"My letter is likewise from him," said Mrs. Brereton. "I declare I'm afraid to open it."

"Why afraid?" cried Stanley. "He couldn't announce his own death?"

"I believe Sir Thomas is dead," observed Minshull, who had lingered near the table, having evidently something to communicate. "Both you, sir, and my mistress will be shocked when I tell you I've just read in the *Daily Telegraph*, which I have in my pocket, that Sir Thomas was shot in a duel at Dieppe, on Tuesday last."

"Are you sure, Minshull?" exclaimed Stanley, quite thunderstruck.

"You can read it yourself, sir," replied the old manservant, producing the paper.

"Yes, here it is!" cried Stanley. 'FATAL DUEL AT DIEPPE.—On the day before yesterday, Sir Thomas Starkey, who has latterly been residing at Dieppe, was shot in a duel by Captain Darcy, of the Grenadier Guards, cousin to Lady Starkey. The unfortunate baronet died immediately. We have not yet learnt the cause of the quarrel.'

"Alas, my poor brother!" exclaimed Mrs. Brereton. "What a sad fate! This puts an end to all my hopes. But let me see what his letter says," she added, tearing it open. "This appears to have been written on the very morning when the duel took place. And what do you think?" she added, suddenly changing her tone. "He has left me a thousand a year."

"A thousand a year!" exclaimed Stanley. "That's very handsome. 'I'm rejoiced to hear it. I wonder whether he has done anything for me,' he added, opening his own letter. "Hurrah!" he cried in an ecstasy of delight. "He has left me all the rest of his property. That must be two thousand a year at least. Something like an uncle, eh?"

"This is what he says: 'I have left a thousand a year to your mother, and I leave the remainder of my property to you.'"

"Astonishing!" exclaimed Mrs. Brereton.

Transported with delight, Stanley sprang from his chair, and danced about the room.

"No Australia now!" he exclaimed. "I'll stop at home! I'll repair and refurnish this dear old house! I'll—I don't know what I won't do!"

Old Minshull, who had not quitted the room, looked almost as much delighted as his young master.

"I sincerely congratulate you, sir," he said, in accents of heartfelt satisfaction; "and you, too, madam."

"As the bearer of these good tidings, Minshull, you ought to be rewarded," said Stanley. "When I receive my fortune, you shall have a hundred pounds."

"And another hundred from me," added Mrs. Brereton.

The old servant thanked them both warmly, and quitted the room.

"Oh! I am so happy!" cried Mrs. Brereton—"so very happy! and yet I ought not to say so," she added, checking herself, "for is not our good fortune purchased by poor Sir Thomas's death?"

"Quite true, my dear mother, quite true! And yet it's impossible to help rejoicing at such an unexpected piece of good luck. I'm afraid I've done my uncle great injustice. I thought rather badly of him—but he has turned out a trump. He must always have had a very kind feeling towards us, or he would never have acted thus."

"Sir Thomas had his faults, no doubt!—but he had a very warm heart—of that I am certain," said Mrs. Brereton.

"He has proved it now," said Stanley. "But he does not seem to have left anything to Lady Starkey?"

"She has a good fortune of her own," remarked Mrs. Brereton. "But I am glad the other lady is not included in his will."

"Do you know who were Sir Thomas's solicitors, mother?" asked Stanley.

"Yes—Dawson and Davis, Hare Court, Inner Temple," she replied.

"No doubt we shall soon hear from them respecting the will," said Stanley.

Just then old Minshull again made his appearance.

"This time I bring you a telegraphic message," he said, delivering the message to Stanley. "Shall the messenger wait?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, the old servant withdrew.

"'Tis from Dawson and Davis, as I suspected," said Stanley. "They have sent to inform me that they hold Sir Thomas's will, which has been recently made, and will forward it immediately on receiving instructions to that effect. All's right, you see, mother. But I won't trouble them to send the will. I'll run up to town to-morrow, and consult them."

"That will be the best plan," said his mother. "The will ought to be left with them."

"No doubt," replied Stanley. "I'll send them a telegram to that effect."

And he hurried out of the room.

"What a sudden turn of fortune!" mentally ejaculated Mrs. Brereton, when she was left alone. "Heaven grant my dear boy may be able to act aright under such trying circumstances. But I need have no anxiety on his account."

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## IX.

### MILDRED WARBURTON.

WHEN Stanley Brereton rose on that eventful morning, nothing seemed left him but to seek a fortune in a new world.

He did not like leaving his mother, to whom he was devotedly attached—for an indefinite period—perhaps for ever! He did not like leaving another person—but he had made up his mind to go. He had been unsuccessful in his attempt to obtain a living, and seemed destined to remain all his life a poor gentleman.

But there was no reason why this should be. He had plenty of energy—plenty of ability—and was remarkably good looking, with very prepossessing manners.

But he was excessively sensitive, and resented the slightest offence—when perhaps none was intended. If treated coolly by an acquaintance, he would never speak to that very person again.

For a poor man, without expectations, this was a foolish course to pursue, and he felt its effects in the loss of several of his best friends.

Thinking his uncle had turned his back upon him, and neglected his mother, he wrote him a very indignant letter, which caused Sir Thomas to discontinue an allowance hitherto made to his sister.

At last, the impracticable young man resolved to leave England, and seek a fortune elsewhere; and after some deliberation, he decided on going to Australia.

People there, he thought, have fewer prejudices than they have in the old country. Besides, no one would know him and what matter if they did? He had only just enough to pay his passage out, and start him. But what did that signify? He should soon make a fortune. At least he fancied so.

We may easily imagine what the effect of such an announcement as he had just received must have been upon a young man so constituted.

From poverty, as he deemed it, to wealth! the change was almost too sudden. He had no expectation whatever of becoming his uncle's heir...nor would he have attempted to seek a reconciliation with him. In another week or so he would probably have set out for Australia.

Just in time to stop him, he learnt that he had suddenly become possessed of a large income. A man must have his feelings pretty well under control not to become excited by such intelligence, and Stanley, who was by no means of a calm temperament, could scarcely contain himself.

After despatching an answer to the solicitors, he went out into the garden, where he could commune with himself.

"At length, I have become a person of some importance," he thought, "and can command as much attention as Sir Thomas, whose position I used to think so enviable. Many plans for the future occur to me, but I shall decide on none till I have well reflected. Whatever else I may do, I won't quit this dear old place. I will restore it, and so realise a dream I have often indulged. Perhaps Mildred may like it as much as I do. We shall see. I wonder whether she has heard of my uncle's death. If so, her curiosity must be aroused. Shall I walk over to Beaucliffe, and tell her and the squire the good news? How surprised both will be!"

He had been meditating thus for more than half an hour, when old Minshull came into the garden to inform him that Squire Warburton and his daughter had just driven over from Beaucliffe House.

"The very persons I wished to see," said Stanley. "Where are they?"

"With your mother, sir," replied Minshull. "I don't know whether I did right, but I ventured to tell them the good news, and wonderfully surprised by it they both were. The squire could scarcely believe what I told him, and put

several questions to me. Miss Mildred clapped her hands with delight. Oh, sir! she's a charming young lady."

That she is, Minshull," said the young man, smiling.

Stanley then hastened towards the house, but had not reached the entrance when a very lovely girl came forth, and sprang forward to meet him.

"I was just coming to look for you," she cried, "and offer you my congratulations. Accept them now."

"They are most welcome," he replied. "How kind of you and the squire to come. I wished of all things to see you. And don't suppose I should have allowed the day to pass without finding my way to Beaucliffe. But this is much better, as it proves that you take some little interest in me."

"But we didn't know you were heir to Brereton," cried Mildred. "We only knew Sir Thomas had been killed in a duel. However, old Minshull quickly enlightened us."

"A good genius must have prompted you, for you have come at the right moment," said Stanley. "Shall we take a turn in the garden?"

She acceded at once to the proposition, and tripped along by his side.

A prettier girl than Mildred Warburton could not be found in the whole county of Chester. Just nineteen, tall, with a slight, graceful figure, dark eyes, dark tresses, lovely features, and a complexion like a blush rose.

A first-rate equestrienne, she constantly went out with the hounds during the hunting season, and was generally in at the death.

Squire Warburton, as her father was generally styled, was excessively fond of her, and indulged all her whims and fancies. He had lost his wife some years before, and Mildred more than supplied her place, for Mrs. Warburton had been a great invalid.

When Mildred did not ride out with the squire she drove him in her pretty pony phaeton, and accompanied him almost everywhere.

Mildred was quite mistress of Beaucliffe—sat at the head of the table, helped to receive the guests, and managed all the servants. She was fortunate in possessing an excellent housekeeper and a very good butler. Nor must we omit to mention that she had a good deal to do with the stables.

Such was the fair Mildred, and being an only daughter

with good expectations and very pretty, we need scarcely say she had a host of admirers. But she favoured none of them.

On the present occasion—as the day was warm and sunny—she wore a light Nankin dress, and a straw hat with a white feather round it.

“Well, you really are an uncommonly lucky fellow, I must say, Stanley,” she remarked, as they entered the garden.

“No doubt about it,” he rejoined; “and I hope my good luck may not desert me now. By-the-by, how do you like this old place?”

“Pretty well. If it was put in order I dare say I should like it better.”

“I mean to restore the house completely, and make it as fine a place as Beaucliffe.”

“Outshine us, eh?”

“No, not outshine you—equal you. When all is done, and Brereton is itself again, will you become its mistress?”

“You put the question so abruptly that I can’t give an answer. I must have time for consideration. Perhaps I may accept the offer—but don’t be too sure. I am very changeable, and may alter my mind in an hour.”

“Then pray decide at once,” he replied, taking her hand and pressing it to his lips. “Say you will be mine.”

But she shook her head.

“I like you well enough,” she said; “but I don’t want to quit papa.”

“I persuaded myself you really loved me, Mildred, and would make a sacrifice for my sake,” he said, with a deeply disappointed look. “But I find you care no more for me than for others.”

“I must ask papa’s consent. I must be guided by him.”

“What do you think he will say?” asked Stanley.

“I can’t tell,” she replied. “Yesterday I am sure he would have refused. But now you have become your uncle’s heir, he may regard you in a different light.”

“Yesterday I shouldn’t have ventured to propose—understand that, Mildred.”

“Your prospects are wonderfully improved, it must be owned. They are all that papa could desire.”

“Then I’ll speak to him at once!” cried Stanley.

“Pray don’t speak to him to-day, or you’ll spoil all. Let me prepare him first.”

"Very well, since you wish it," replied Stanley, rather surprised. "May I give him a hint?"

"Not the slightest," she rejoined. "I forbid you on pain of my displeasure. But let us go and join them. We've been here too long already."

"To me it seems only a moment," replied Stanley, as they quitted the garden.

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## X.

### SQUIRE WARBURTON OF BEAUCLIFFE.

SQUIRE WARBURTON was the picture of a jovial country gentleman. He looked wonderfully hale and hearty, and though not far from seventy, boasted he had never known a day's illness in his life.

Yet he was not one of your prudent folk, who live by rule, and deprive themselves of the enjoyments of life, in order to prolong it.

On the contrary, he liked a good dinner, and a glass of old port after it; and as he had an excellent French cook and a well-stocked cellar, he was able to indulge his tastes.

In person the squire was tall and robust, with good features, and a rich, rosy complexion. His dark brown hair had become snow-white, and contrasted strongly, though not disagreeably, with his pink cheeks.

His costume—about which he was very particular—consisted of a blue coat with brass buttons, a buff waistcoat, a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, long gaiters, and not unfrequently boots with brown tops.

Squire Warburton, as we have said, was exceedingly fond of his daughter, and showed no inclination to part with her.

It was understood that she had received several advantageous offers, but none had been accepted.

Whether the suitors were refused by the squire or his daughter, did not appear.

Stanley had always been a favourite of the squire, who was exceedingly kind to him, and gave him a general invitation to Beaucliffe. Seeing so much of Mildred, the young

man naturally fell in love with her, but he managed to conceal his passion, and the old gentleman never suspected it.

When the youthful pair returned from the garden, they found the squire in the entrance hall with Mrs. Brereton.

Calling to Stanley, in his cheery tones, Mr. Warburton stepped forward, and shook him by the hand with more than his usual cordiality.

"I congratulate you most heartily, my boy," he exclaimed, "on your good fortune. You deserve it. But I confess I never thought you would obtain it. It has come just in the nick of time. In another week we should have lost you. How obliging in Sir Thomas to get out of the way at this juncture. You will now be able to take a place with the best of us—always supposing you fancy a country gentleman's life."

"I have had no experience of any other, sir," replied Stanley; "but it suits me perfectly."

"Stanley tells me he means to restore this old house, papa," observed Mildred.

"Bravo!" exclaimed the squire. "It *has* been a fine place, and no doubt will be a fine place again."

"It shall be, I promise you, sir," said Stanley.

"Give good dinners, keep plenty of company, and you'll soon become popular," said the squire. "But to make the home complete, you'll want a wife."

"That will do later on," said Mrs. Brereton.

"Ten years hence, I should say," added Mildred.

"I'll bet a hundred to twenty he doesn't wait half that time," laughed the squire.

"I must finish my house before I think of marrying," said Stanley.

"A very prudent resolve, my boy," observed the squire. "Stick to it. And now when will you come and dine with us?"

"As soon as I return," replied Stanley. "I'm going up to town to-morrow morning."

"Then come to-day! And I hope you'll come with him, ma'am. The carriage shall fetch you and take you back."

"You are very kind, sir," replied Mrs. Brereton. "But I don't think we ought to dine out to-day."

"Poh!—we have nobody staying with us," said the squire. "We shall be quite alone."

"Pray *do* come, dear Mrs. Brereton," urged Mildred, "We shall be very glad to see you."

Stanley looked entreatingly at his mother.

"Well, since you are alone, that alters the case," replied Mrs. Brereton. "We'll come."

"Glad to hear it," cried the squire. "Expect the carriage at six."

The visitors then took leave, and Stanley conducted the young lady to the pony phaeton, and pressed her hand gently as he placed her in her seat.

The little carriage was the prettiest thing imaginable, as we have said—the ponies were perfect, and Mildred never looked better than when she sat behind them with a whip in her hand.

As soon as the squire had got in, and the groom had jumped up, she just touched the lively animals, and off they started.

"Well, my darling," said the squire, as they went on their way; "what think you now of our young friend? Do you like him any better, eh?"

"How do *you* like him, papa?" she rejoined, avoiding the question.

"I've always liked him," he replied. "But I never regarded him as a possible son-in-law."

"Do you regard him so now?" she asked.

"I'll tell you a week hence," he replied, somewhat doubtfully.

"But you seem to encourage him."

"I wanted to see what his intentions are," he replied.

Mildred did not like to say more on the subject just then.

Beauchiffé was about five miles from the place they had just quitted, and the drive thither was through a very pretty country—in fact, the last two miles were the park, which was extremely varied and beautiful, and boasted some extremely fine old timber, Mr. Warburton having used the axe very judiciously.

Next to the trees, the chief ornament of the place was the Mere, a large sheet of water in front of the mansion, with a drive partly round it.

The park was well stocked with deer, and you could scarcely look in any direction without catching a glimpse of a herd, either crouching beneath some great tree or tripping off to a covert.

Dating from Elizabeth's time, Beaucliffe was a much more imposing structure than Brereton, and excellently preserved. The frontage was very fine, having wings ornamented by gables and large mullioned windows, with two tall octagonal towers in the centre, beneath which was an arched gateway leading to a large quadrangular court.

From its position in front of the Mere, and the woods around it, Beaucliffe house was seen to great advantage as you approached it from the long avenue.

Just as the squire and his fair daughter turned into a drive leading to the gateway, they perceived a couple of stylish-looking young men on horseback, each with a groom behind him, coming from the house, where they had evidently been calling.

"Who the deuce are those two gay bucks, Mildred?" said the squire.

"Piers Massey and Reginald Brooke," she replied. "I'm surprised you don't know them, papa."

"I didn't know them at first, but I now recollect asking them to dine with us one day this week. Could it have been to-day?"

"Most likely. If so, you'll be in a pretty fix with Mrs. Brereton."

"You must send her back word."

"No—no—we can't do that! But here the young fellows come."

And she stopped in order to speak to them.

Both were good-looking, well-dressed, and well-mannered, and not at all foppish.

Hats raised, as they approached the phaeton on either side, their first salutation being made to Mildred, and then each had a hearty shake of the hand from her father.

"Well, here we are, you perceive, squire," cried Piers Massey.

"No reminder needed," added Reginald Brooke.

"Glad to see you both," said the squire in his heartiest manner, "but to tell you the truth, I wasn't quite sure of the day."

"I hope we've made no mistake, Miss Warburton?" said Reginald Brooke.

"It makes no sort of difference to us," she replied. "To-day is just as convenient as to-morrow."

"Yes, we know your papa's character for hospitality," said Piers Massey. "But he might have some other engagement."

"None that will interfere with you," rejoined the squire. "You'll stay till to-morrow?"

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Massey. "Since you assure us we're not in the way."

"We've just returned from Brereton," said Mildred. "Perhaps you've not heard of Stanley's good luck?"

"No! what is it?" cried the two young fellows, surprised.

"His uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey, I see, has just got shot in a duel at Dieppe," observed Brooke.

"But before getting shot, Sir Thomas took care to leave Stanley all his property," said the squire. "So he's now very well off."

"That's the way to do it," cried Massey. "I wish I had a rich uncle who wanted to make me his heir."

"You would let him fight a duel, I suppose?" observed Mildred.

"Half a dozen, if he wished," replied the young man. "He would probably get killed in one of them."

And they all laughed, except the squire.

"No jesting on this subject," cried the old gentleman.

"We expect Stanley and his mother at dinner to-day."

"Then we won't make the slightest allusion to the duel," said both young men, still laughing.

The party then went on to the house, where a portly butler and a couple of footmen in livery appeared at the entrance. Mildred sprang from her seat and vanished, leaving the squire to attend to the young men.

In another minute the saddle-bags, with which the grooms were charged, were delivered to the footmen, and the squire conducted his unexpected guests to a large and magnificently furnished drawing-room, looking upon the park and the Mere.

"Ah, here it is," exclaimed Reginald Brooke, rapturously, advancing as he spoke towards the window, the lower part of which was standing open. "Here's the matchless view! No one in Cheshire has such a look-out as you, squire."

"You flatter me," replied the old gentleman, in a deprecatory tone, but by no means displeased by the compliment.

"I'm exactly of Brooke's opinion," said Massey, advancing. "You should have the scene painted."

"It has been painted, and by a first-rate artist," replied the squire. "The picture was greatly admired at the last Exhibition; but I've not yet got it home."

While they were gazing at the lovely prospect, finding out new beauties every minute, Mildred entered the room.

She had changed her dress, and looked more charming than ever in her new costume.

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## XI.

### SIR RANDAL DE BLUNDEVILLE.

As she moved towards a splendid piano, which stood at one side of the room, she observed to the young men, who instantly joined her, "Are either of you musical?"

Both shook their heads.

"Your education has been shamefully neglected," she cried, opening the instrument, and running her fingers rapidly over the keys.

"But we are both amateurs," said Massey; "and are quite able to appreciate Miss Warburton's brilliant performance."

"I accept the compliment, though it is wholly undeserved," she replied, sitting down, and commencing a gavotte by Bach, which enchanted them.

She then played a sonatina by Beethoven—played it charmingly—a gigue by Bach, and was engaged on a valse by Chopin, when an interruption was offered by the portly butler who appeared at the door, and announced Lady Talmash.

Mildred immediately quitted the piano and hastened to meet her.

Lady Talmash was not alone, but had with her a couple of very pretty and very well-dressed girls, whom she introduced as Miss Carleton and Miss Selina Carleton.

Mildred had often heard of them, and was enchanted to see them, and so was the squire, with whom Lady Talmash was a special favourite.

Her ladyship was the widow of Sir Hugh Talmash—very handsome, very captivating, and not more than thirty. As

she always seemed to like the squire's society, and laughed at his jests, no wonder he admired her.

"We are come to have a little lawn tennis with you, my dear," said Lady Talmash to Mildred. "I told my young friends they would be sure of some out-door amusement on a fine day, at Beaucliffe."

"And they shall not be disappointed," replied Mildred. "There are two capital players, who I am sure will be happy to assist."

Both the young men were known to Lady Talmash, and having shaken hands with her, were presented to her friends.

After a little chat the whole party walked out through the open window upon the lawn, and, as might be expected, the Miss Carletons were delighted with everything they beheld.

They were really two very fine girls—especially Selina—and the young men began to pay them attention.

Assisted by a footman, who had been summoned for the purpose, the squire and his daughter were making arrangements for a game at lawn tennis, when two more visitors were announced.

These were Sir Randal de Blundeville, a person of considerable importance, and Mr. Marston Malpas, another of Mildred's numerous admirers.

How they all contrived to find their way to Beaucliffe on this particular day—when he expected none of them—the hospitable squire could not imagine. But it put him out very much for a few minutes, and he had hardly recovered his usual good humour when he went to welcome the proud baronet.

A very stately personage was Sir Randal de Blundeville—so stiff and formal, that even his most intimate friends stood in awe of him. Sir Randal was of middle age, and had a very commanding presence, his large features being marked by a haughty expression.

His young friend, Marston Malpas, was very deferential to him, and consequently a great favourite.

The squire received his important visitor with some ceremony, and expressed great pleasure in seeing him, secretly wondering whether there was any particular motive for the call.

Walking towards the party on the lawn, Sir Randal bowed to Mildred, shook hands with Lady Talmash, and

made himself rather more agreeable than usual. For a short time, young Malpas remained near him, but he soon afterwards joined the players.

Since it was now quite clear that everybody would stay to luncheon, the squire hurried off to give some directions to his housekeeper, Mrs. Twemlow; but he found she had made all needful arrangements.

"You might have left the matter to me, sir," she said, somewhat reproachfully.

"I know I might, Mrs. Twemlow," he replied, "but I thought it best to inform you now that Sir Randal de Blundeville is here."

"I was quite aware of it," replied Mrs. Twemlow.

He next spoke to his butler, Glossop, and bade him take care to have plenty of champagne and hock.

The butler promised attention, and satisfied that all would go on well, the squire returned to his visitors, and found everybody engaged at lawn tennis, except Sir Randal.

The latter was seated on a bench by himself at a little distance from the players, and the squire immediately joined him.

"I'm glad you're come back, Mr. Warburton," said Sir Randal. "I have a proposal to make to you, and this is a good opportunity of making it."

"Quite ready to listen to anything you have to say, Sir Randal," rejoined the squire, wondering what the deuce was coming.

"I need not tell you, Mr. Warburton," premised Sir Randal, "that your daughter is universally admired. Her charms and accomplishments are talked about throughout the county. She seems to turn the heads and captivate the hearts of all she meets. You won't be surprised, therefore, to learn that she has made a new conquest."

"Surely he is not going to propose for her himself!" thought the squire. "I must act rather cautiously."

He then said aloud, "That depends upon circumstances, Sir Randal. I might be very much surprised."

"But if I tell you that I have an offer to make——"

"On your own part, Sir Randal?" interrupted the squire. "However much I might feel honoured, I fear my daughter——"

"You mistake my meaning altogether, sir," said Sir

Randal. "I am not such a fool as to offer myself to a lovely girl like Miss Warburton. But I promised to say a word for my young friend, Marston Malpas, who seems to have some difficulty in pleading his own cause. In my opinion he is not ineligible, being well connected, well off, and able to make a good settlement if required."

"I don't doubt it, Sir Randal, but I'm afraid he has no chance," said the squire; "and therefore I won't encourage him. To tell you the truth, my daughter is quite perplexed—she has so many suitors."

"Then there is an end of the matter," replied Sir Randal. "Marston must look elsewhere for a wife."

"Pray tell him that I should have liked him very much for a son-in-law," said the squire. "But I have really no voice in the matter."

"I will tell him what you say, sir," replied Sir Randall, with an incredulous smile.

"Young Malpas had watched the interview between his representative and the squire, and quite understood what they were talking about.

The significant look given him by Sir Randal told him that his hopes were crushed.

"Well, I shan't die of disappointment," he thought.

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## XII.

### LUNCHEON.

ABOUT half an hour later luncheon was announced.

A joyous response was made on all sides to the summons, and those engaged at lawn tennis immediately ceased playing.

Offering his arm to Lady Talmash, the squire begged Sir Randal to take charge of Mildred; and, leaving the young men to choose whom they liked, he led the way to the house.

The dining-room windows, like those of the drawing-room, looked upon the lawn, and being left open the guests could enter as they pleased.

The portly butler and the footmen were there to attend upon them, and find them places at the large round table in the centre of the room, laden with cold viands and glittering with silver and glass.

In a very few minutes all were seated—and very agreeably to themselves, as it seemed—when it was noticed there was a vacant chair on the right of Lady Talmash.

At the very moment, when the superfluous chair was about to be removed, some one appeared at the window, and proved to be Stanley Brereton.

Though very much surprised to see him, the squire instantly sent the butler to beg him to come in. Stanley at once complied, and bowed to the company, while the squire, pointing to the vacant chair, said merrily :

“A seat, you perceive, has been kept for you, my boy. But you are rather earlier than I expected.”

“A word will explain,” replied the young man. “After your departure, my mother decided on remaining at home to-day, so I agreed to walk over and let you know. And here I am.”

“And very glad I am to see you,” replied the squire.

A good deal of laughter followed Stanley’s brief explanation ; but all the party, though surprised, seemed pleased to see him—especially Lady Talmash.

“I’ve just been told that he has succeeded to his uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey’s property,” observed Sir Randal to Mildred. “Can it be true?”

“Quite true,” she replied.

Then everybody began to talk about the young man’s good fortune, and many of the remarks—though made in a low tone—could not fail to reach his ears. Luckily, they were very complimentary.

Meanwhile wings of cold chicken, with slices of tongue and ham, together with portions of pigeon pie and other matters, were handed round, while the glasses foamed with champagne; and in a very few minutes the conversation became much more lively.

The squire was delighted, for nothing pleased him more than a merry party.

“I am so glad your ladyship came over to us to-day,” he said. “Those Miss Carletons seem very nice girls.”

“Uncommonly nice girls,” she replied. “I must introduce you to them presently,” she added to Stanley. “By-the-by, have you fixed any plans? Do you mean to stay in this part of the country?”

“I’ll answer for him,” interposed the squire. “He means

to restore Brereton, and make a much finer house of it than this."

"That would scarcely be possible, I think," smiled Lady Talmash.

"Wholly impossible," said Stanley. "The squire is only jesting. But I mean to do something for the old place."

"I used to admire it, but I have not seen it lately," observed her ladyship.

"No one has," replied Stanley; "and I was about to abandon it altogether, when my uncle, making me his heir, has preserved Brereton to the family."

"Very satisfactory," said Lady Talmash. "When you have finished your improvements you must ask us all to come and see your place."

"The improvements will take a long time," remarked the squire. "He must ask us soon."

"Never mind the house being out of repair," said Lady Talmash. "We are sure to be pleased with it. Besides," she added significantly, "you may find other arrangements necessary."

"Precisely what I told him," observed the squire.

"I will follow your ladyship's advice," replied Stanley; "and I hope you will allow me to consult you?"

"Don't hesitate at any time," she rejoined, in the most affable manner.

While this conversation was going on, more champagne had been handed round, and sweets and *patisserie* had succeeded the solids.

After all, champagne is the only wine at luncheon. Hock is very well in its way, and has its charms for men, but it does not raise the spirits so quickly as champagne, and is therefore not so much liked by ladies.

We do not know how often Glossop went round the table, but whenever he made the circuit, he allowed no glass to remain empty.

Thus the party became remarkably cheerful, and a great deal of laughter was heard as they issued forth upon the lawn.

They did not immediately resume their pastime, but collected in two or three groups.

Lady Talmash did not forget her promise, and introduced Stanley to the Miss Carletons, with whom he seemed much

pleased, but they were still engaged to Massey and Reginald Brooke.

Before he could address himself to Mildred, the squire came up, and took him to Sir Randal, who had begged to be made known to him.

"I have only just learned that you have succeeded to your uncle's property, sir," said the baronet. "I knew Sir Thomas Starkey well, and liked him. When he was young—about your age—there never was a finer-looking man, nor a more perfect gentleman."

"I am much pleased, Sir Randal, to hear you speak in such terms of my uncle," said Stanley. "Though his nearest relative, I really knew very little of him, but I always thought him very handsome."

"So he was," replied Sir Randal. "I am very much concerned at the manner of his death, but I will say no more about that. Miss Warburton tells me you are likely to remain amongst us."

"It is my intention to restore Brereton and occupy the place, Sir Randal," said Stanley. "You will be surprised to see me here to-day. But I expected to find Mr. Warburton and his daughter quite alone. Imagine my surprise at meeting a large party."

"Oh, I understand all about it," rejoined Sir Randal. "It is quite an accident that I am here myself. But I am very glad I came, since I have met you. When you get settled I hope you will come and see me."

"Delighted. But I am going up to town to-morrow on business, and don't exactly know when I shall get back."

"Adieu, then, for the present," said Sir Randal.

And after a brief converse with the squire, he quitted the party.

"You have gained a friend in Sir Randal," said the squire, coming up to Stanley, and clapping him on the shoulder. "He seemed vastly pleased with you."

"I am equally pleased with him," replied the other. "He is not at all the consequential personage he has been represented."

"He can be affable to those he likes," laughed the squire; "but intolerably rude to such as annoy him. But won't you play lawn tennis?"

"No, thank you," replied Stanley. "I mean to run away as soon as I have said a word to your daughter."

"I'm afraid you're put out by the party," remarked the squire; "but we really couldn't help it. They all came unexpectedly."

At this moment Mildred ran up to them.

"You are not going, Stanley?" she cried.

"Yes, he is," said the squire.

"I forbid you," she cried; "and shall be highly offended if you disobey my mandate."

"I shall be sorry to incur your displeasure," he replied; "but you really must excuse me."

"No, I won't," she rejoined. "Disobey at your peril!"

"How will you punish me?" he cried, forcing a laugh.

"You will see," she replied. "But I advise you not to try me."

"Come! come! this is all nonsense!" cried the squire.

"Don't compel him to stay against his inclination."

At this juncture, Reginald Brooke called out to Mildred that she was wanted.

"I'm coming," she replied. "Take heed," she added in a low tone to Stanley. "You'll repent it if you go."

And she hurried away.

Stanley looked rather perplexed, but the squire treated the matter as a jest.

"Don't stay if you don't like it," he said.

"Farewell, then," rejoined Stanley, shaking his hand.

"Don't come with me!"

And he slowly quitted the lawn, without once looking back.

Mildred could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw him depart. She fully expected him to obey her injunctions, and was very much provoked by his disregard of them.

"I will never see him again!—never!" she mentally ejaculated.

"Is Mr. Stanley Brereton gone?" inquired Lady Talmash.

"I suppose so," replied Mildred, as if it was a matter of perfect indifference to her.

"Oh! I'm so sorry," cried her ladyship. "I wanted to talk to him about several things. He didn't give me a hint that he was leaving immediately."

"It was a sudden resolve, I fancy," said Mildred.

"Not a sudden quarrel, I hope," thought Lady Talmash.

"It looks very much like it."

Stanley's departure was not without its effect on Mildred.

She seemed suddenly to have lost her spirits, and Lady Talmash became convinced that her conjecture as to a quarrel was correct.

"Precisely the occasion when a misunderstanding ought to have been avoided," thought her ladyship.

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### XIII.

#### STANLEY CALLS ON HIS SOLICITORS.

HAVING made such preparations overnight as he deemed necessary for the journey, and taken leave of his mother, Stanley started next morning by an early train for London.

His parting with Mildred had not been very satisfactory, and he blamed himself for the haste with which he had quitted Beaucliffe; but he trusted all would be forgotten before his return.

"I never knew her so peremptory," he thought; and certainly she never before threatened me with her displeasure. However, she could not have meant it seriously, and a reconciliation will be easily effected. I won't make myself uneasy."

But in spite of this resolution the quarrel haunted him during the whole of the journey.

On arriving in town he left his luggage at the station, and taking a hansom cab to the Temple, proceeded to the offices of Messrs. Dawson and Davies, in Hare-court.

On giving his name to a clerk, he was shown into a room evidently devoted to legal business, where he found Mr. Dawson—a thin, middle-aged man, with grey hair and sharp features.

On hearing his name, the solicitor immediately arose, and shaking hands with him cordially, said:

"Pray sit down, and let us talk matters over."

Stanley took the chair offered him.

"Let me ask you in the first place, Mr. Dawson," he said, "where my uncle is to be buried?"

"Sir Thomas is already buried in the cemetery at Dieppe," replied Mr. Dawson. "On receiving intelligence of his death, Mr. Davies, my partner, immediately started for Dieppe, and

on arriving there found that the *Compte de Clairvaux*—Sir Thomas's most intimate friend, and his second in the unfortunate affair—had already made arrangements for his friend's interment in the place I have mentioned. The *compte*, it appeared, had been influenced by a lady to whom Sir Thomas was greatly attached, and who affirmed that it was the deceased baronet's own wish that if his death occurred while he was in Dieppe, he should be buried in the Protestant burial ground, and he had even chosen a spot for his grave. Not doubting for a moment the truth of what was told him, Mr. Davies allowed the funeral to take place. The ceremony was performed in the quietest manner possible, and when all was over, it was understood that the poor lady who assisted at it meant to hide herself for ever in a religious retreat."

"Your narration interests me deeply, sir," replied Stanley much moved. "This unhappy lady seems to have been very much attached to my unfortunate uncle."

"She was devotedly attached to him, sir, as I myself have heard from Sir Thomas's own lips," replied Mr. Dawson. "Luckily for you she is very well off, or your uncle would have left her a great part of his property. He told me so himself."

"I may esteem myself singularly fortunate in all respects," said Stanley. "At one time I had no reason to expect that Sir Thomas would remember me in any way."

"He only made his will when he was last in London—a short time ago," replied Mr. Dawson. "But I ought to tell you that he had then expressed himself in very kindly terms concerning your mother and yourself. If he has hitherto neglected you both, he has now made ample amends. At this moment, I cannot exactly say what you will inherit from him, but I believe it will not be far from three thousand a year."

Stanley could hardly repress his satisfaction.

"As you are aware," pursued Mr. Dawson, "he had large landed property in Cheshire, from which the bulk of his income was derived. All this is now yours. Mr. Davies and myself are appointed his executors, and we will see that all his directions are duly fulfilled."

"I could not be in better hands, sir," remarked Stanley. "Is it necessary, think you, that I should go over to Dieppe?"

"By no means," rejoined Mr. Dawson. "My partner will do all that is required. I expect he will return either to-morrow or next day, and then you will know exactly what has

occurred. But I am certain nothing will be left undone. No doubt you will remain in town some little time?"

"I must needs do so," replied Stanley. "This matter has come upon me so suddenly that I have not yet had time to provide myself with mourning. I mean to put up at the York Hotel, Albemarle-street."

"Very good," said Mr. Dawson, making a note of the address. "Poor Lady Starkey called upon us yesterday to make inquiries respecting her late husband, and expressed a great desire to see you. She wishes to explain to you that she did her utmost to prevent this unfortunate duel."

"I will make a point of calling upon her," replied Stanley.

"You will find her in Berkeley-square," said Mr. Dawson.

After some further conversation with the solicitor, on matters of business, Stanley took leave, promising to call again on the morrow.

He then drove to the railway station, where he gave certain directions respecting his luggage: after which he proceeded to a fashionable tailor's in Bond-street and ordered such mourning as he required to be got ready without delay; and, lastly, he secured charming rooms at the York Hotel, Albemarle-street, where he ordered dinner.

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#### XIV.

##### ROSE HYLTON.

BEFORE noon next day, the suit of sables, which Stanley had ordered, was sent him by the expeditious tailor, and attired in these sombre habiliments, and with a deep band round his hat, the young man went to call upon Lady Starkey in Berkeley-square.

All the servants he beheld were in black, and upon being ushered into her ladyship's presence, he found her in the deepest mourning.

In her case, the garb of widowhood did not appear unbecoming.

She was alone at the time in her boudoir, and received him with great kindness; but on attempting to address him, she could not restrain her grief.

Stanley endeavoured to express his sympathy, but he likewise was much moved.

"It is very good of you to come to see me," she said. "I received a note last evening from Mr. Dawson, telling me I might expect you, and it gave me much satisfaction. I am sure you will believe that I could not have been instrumental in causing this deplorable duel. Though I had long lost my husband's affection, and though he had deeply injured me, I never ceased to love him, and could not have avenged myself in this way."

And she again covered her face, and sobbed aloud.

"Your ladyship need not give me that assurance," said Stanley.

Recovering after a few moments, she continued :

"Intelligence of the fatal event was brought me by Captain Darcy himself. My mind foreboded ill when I beheld him. But on learning the dreadful truth, I loaded him with reproaches, and he left me—nor have I seen him since. The anguish caused me by the news was terrible. I could only think of my husband as he had once been—loving and devoted,—and I had now lost him for ever ! But by degrees I became calmer, and though I feel I shall never be happy again, yet I can bear my affliction."

"Possessing such a wife, I cannot understand how Sir Thomas could leave you," said Stanley.

"I loved him too well," replied her ladyship, in tones that penetrated Stanley's heart. "Had I loved him less, he might have loved me more."

"I will not attempt to offer you consolation," he said ; "but I feel for you most deeply."

A brief silence ensued, which was broken by her ladyship.

"I wish to give you my assurance," she said, in accents that proclaimed her sincerity, "that I am perfectly satisfied with what Sir Thomas has done for yourself and your mother. I confess I did not expect it—but it was well done—very well done. I trust you will become a worthy representative of the family."

"I will try to be so," replied Stanley, earnestly.

"You will always find a warm friend in me," continued her ladyship. "And had your mother not been left you, I would have endeavoured to supply her place."

"I know not how to express my gratitude to your ladyship," said Stanley, with much emotion.

At this moment, the door opened, and a remarkably pretty girl, apparently about nineteen, entered the room.

"A slight, graceful figure, lovely features, blue eyes, and light tresses constituted her charms.

"My niece, Rose Hylton," said Lady Starkey, presenting her to Stanley, who had risen on her appearance. "I forgot to mention that she is staying with me."

"I knew Mr. Stanley Brereton was with you, aunt," said the young lady; "but I ventured to come in. Recent circumstances have made me take a strong interest in you," she added to Stanley.

"You are very kind," he replied. "I should have been sorry to lose the pleasure of seeing you. Have you been long in town, may I venture to ask?"

"I only arrived yesterday," she replied. "My aunt sent for me, and I came up from Sussex at once."

"I want a companion," said her ladyship, "and dear Rose suits me better than any one else."

"I can easily imagine that," said Stanley. "I hope she will stay with you now she is come."

"I shall not part with her in a hurry," said Lady Starkey. "Unluckily, I cannot go out just now, and I am unable to offer her any amusement."

"You know my quiet tastes, dearest aunt," observed Rose. "I don't care for parties. A drive in the park is all I desire—and that I *can* have."

"Yes, I can promise you a daily drive," said her ladyship. "And perhaps we may sometimes meet Mr. Stanley Brereton."

"I hope so," observed Rose. "I shall look out for him."

"Then you must look out for me among the pedestrians," said Stanley; "for I have neither carriage nor horses at present."

"But you will soon have both, I make no doubt," said Lady Starkey.

"Possibly," he rejoined, "but I don't mean to be in a hurry."

"Quite right," said Rose. "Papa always says you are sure to find what you want, if you wait for it."

"Do you ride much?" inquired Stanley.

"Not so much as I should like," she replied, "and never to hounds."

"There you differ from a young lady of my acquaintance," said Stanley. "She frequently heads the field, and some-

times comes in at the death. Perhaps your ladyship may know her—Miss Warburton, of Beauchliffe."

"I've heard of her," replied Lady Starkey. "But I don't wish Rose to resemble her."

"I've no desire to excel as an equestrian," said the young lady.

"Hunting, I think, leads to a great deal of mischief among girls," said Lady Starkey; "and gives them bold and masculine manners. They cannot constantly associate with this class of men, without acquiring their habits."

"I must confess there is some truth in your ladyship's observations," said Stanley.

"I hope you will never hunt, Rose," remarked Lady Starkey to her niece.

"After your strongly expressed disapproval, you may depend upon it I never will, dear aunt," replied Rose.

Here the footman entered and announced Sir John Lambert and Captain Darcy.

On hearing the latter name, Stanley was about to depart instantly, but Lady Starkey stopped him.

"Don't go," she said. "I particularly wish you to remain."

Next moment the two gentlemen were ushered into the room.

Sir John stepped forward, and shook hands with her ladyship, but Captain Darcy contented himself with bowing gravely.

Both noticed Stanley. Neither knew him but they guessed who he was.

"I hope your ladyship has in some degree recovered from the shock you have experienced," said Sir John.

Lady Starkey made a suitable reply.

"I hope your ladyship can now tolerate my presence," said Darcy. "Command me and I will instantly depart."

Lady Starkey motioned him to stay.

"It is now too late to remedy this unfortunate affair," she said, addressing Darcy. "So I will not reproach you further."

"Clearly understand that I did not desire that the encounter should have a fatal termination," he replied. "A slight hurt would have satisfied me."

"But you acted contrary to my wishes in seeking a meeting," said her ladyship.

"My own honour was concerned," he rejoined. "I could not allow you to be thus wronged."

"No more of this, or I shall enjoin your instant departure," said Lady Starkey.

"I ought to tell you that Mr. Stanley Brereton is the last person who can complain of what I have done," said Darcy, significantly.

"My uncle has left me a legacy of vengeance, and I shall not neglect it," said Stanley, sternly.

"This is neither the time, nor the place, for talk like this, gentlemen," interposed Sir John Lambert. "But I must say that Mr. Stanley Brereton very properly resents the affront offered him."

"Then I am very sorry for what I have said," rejoined Darcy, "and sincerely beg Mr. Brereton's pardon. I really meant no offence, sir," he added to Stanley.

"That I can readily understand, Captain Darcy," said Stanley; "and I therefore accept your proffered hand. Let us forget the matter."

"Agreed," said Darcy.

Sir John Lambert seemed much relieved that an end had been put to the quarrel—but his anxiety had been nothing to that felt by Lady Starkey, who blamed herself greatly for detaining Stanley.

Rose, who had repressed her feelings during the scene, and did not utter a word, kept near her aunt.

Very soon afterwards, Darcy took his departure, much to her ladyship's relief.

Sir John did not accompany him, but remained to set himself straight.

"Darcy is a strange, impracticable fellow," he said. "He came here to sue for your ladyship's forgiveness, and he has given fresh offence. I am sure he had no desire whatever to quarrel with Mr. Stanley Brereton, and yet he contrived to do so."

"As far as I am concerned, I shall think no more about the occurrence," said Stanley. "But I owe something to my uncle's memory, and I don't care to associate with the man by whose hand my benefactor has fallen. I must therefore decline to meet Captain Darcy again."

"I don't wonder at your decision," said Lady Starkey. "I hoped the meeting would have had a different result, but it cannot be helped."

"I trust I have given you no offence, Mr. Brereton," said Sir John.

"I am much pleased to have met you," replied the other.

"And I hope you will often meet Sir John again here," said her ladyship. "He is one of my oldest and best friends."

"It will always be a pleasure to me to meet him," replied Stanley.

"He then proposed to depart, and as he took leave, Lady Starkey expressed a hope that he would come to her next day.

"Pray do!" added Rose, with a smile that was quite irresistible.

"We have a great deal more to talk about," said her ladyship.

Rose looked as if she thought so too, but did not give utterance to her sentiments.

Stanley gladly promised to come, and made his bow.

"A very nice young man, and deserves his good fortune," observed Sir John.

"I have taken a great liking to him," said Lady Starkey; "and am really much pleased that Sir Thomas made him his heir."

"Your ladyship displays great liberality," said the old baronet.

"Pray come to luncheon to-morrow, Sir John, and improve your acquaintance with him," said Lady Starkey.

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## XV.

### STANLEY RECEIVES A LETTER FROM HIS MOTHER.

ON coming down to breakfast next morning, Stanley found a letter from his mother. It had been sent by the solicitors, to whose care it was addressed.

Strange to say there was a good deal in it about Lady Starkey, and Mrs. Brereton expressed a hope that her son would not fail to call in Berkeley-square.

"I particularly wish you to see her ladyship," she said, "as she might be hurt by any neglect at this moment, and I should be much grieved if such were the case. As you are

well aware, Lady Starkey and I have not met for several years, nor has any correspondence taken place between us during that period, but I have the highest opinion of her. I think she has conducted herself admirably well towards my poor brother, under most trying circumstances. Indeed, I firmly believe very few of her sex could have acted as well as she has done. Possibly she may not be altogether satisfied with the disposition made by Sir Thomas in regard to his property; but I trust, as she herself is so well off, she may be reconciled to the arrangement. At any rate, I beg you will offer her my sincere sympathy under her affliction. With an expression of the warm regard and respect I always feel for her."

"I am very glad my mother has written this letter," thought Stanley. "I'll take it with me to-day, and read it to her ladyship. I wish they could meet, as I believe they would like each other. Since my interview with her ladyship yesterday, I seem to know her much better than before, and I must be insensible indeed if I did not now appreciate her extraordinary kindness."

While making these reflections, he had laid down the letter, but now took it up again, and perceived a postscript, which he had not previously noticed.

Thus it ran: "Lady Talmash and Mildred Warburton rode over here this morning, with the evident intention of looking at the house. They stayed about half an hour, and her ladyship, who is a most charming person, made herself very agreeable. I don't know why, but I wasn't so much pleased as usual with Mildred. She seemed in an ill humour, and Minshull told me he overheard her say to Lady Talmash that she disliked the old house, and could never make up her mind to live in it. I tell you this, dear boy, because I think you ought to know it."

"Dislikes the place, does she?" cried Stanley to himself. "I'm glad I know it. She shall never be forced to live there. She must have changed her mind quite suddenly, for she used to like it—at least she led me to believe so. But I can guess the reason of the change, and if she resents a slight matter thus, I had better think no more about her. I am very glad this quarrel has occurred before I commenced my alterations. I'll leave the old place as it is, for the present."

Vexed by this disagreeable intelligence, Stanley made a very poor breakfast, nor could he even read the *Times*.

So he sat down at a side table and wrote a letter to his mother, telling her how much he had been pleased by his visit to Lady Starkey, and making some slight mention of Rose Hylton, whom he described as a very nice girl.

"As to Mildred's dislike of the old house, it is quite immaterial," he said. "I don't think she will ever be asked to reside there."

Having finished his letter and left it to be posted, he went out and strolled into the park.

The fine weather had brought out a number of equestrians. Amongst these the majority were young ladies with their attendants. There were likewise a few carriages.

Having heard Rose say that she and her aunt drove out early, Stanley looked out for them, and ere long discovered her ladyship's brougham. Both ladies were inside it, and perceiving him at the same time, they stopped the carriage, and Stanley went up to them immediately.

"I fancied we should meet you in the park this morning, Mr. Brereton," said Rose. "What a delightful day for a drive or a walk."

"Charming," he replied. "Your ladyship is quite right to take advantage of it."

"I always come here early, if the day is fine," she replied. "I don't care for a crowd of fashionable folks, and prefer the park as it is at present."

"Have you been long here, Mr. Brereton?" asked Rose.

"No, I have only just come out," he replied. "I have been writing to my mother, and have received a letter from her, in which she speaks of your ladyship in terms that I think will please you."

"I should much like to hear what she says," observed Lady Starkey.

"There is the letter," replied Stanley, taking it from his pocket, and giving it her.

Opening it and glancing at its contents she seemed deeply moved.

"Will you leave this letter with me for a short time?" she remarked to Stanley. "I should like to read it again when alone. I need not say how gratified I am by your mother's good opinion."

"Take it by all means," replied Stanley. "You can place entire faith in my mother's sincerity."

"I know I can," replied Lady Starkey. "Pray tell the coachman to drive home. We shall see you anon."

Having done her ladyship's behest, Stanley bowed and withdrew.

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## XVI.

### A GHOST STORY.

"I AM very glad we happened to meet with Mr. Brereton, aunt," said Rose. "His mother's letter seems to have pleased you."

"It has pleased me exceedingly," replied her aunt. "She has spoken of me in most gratifying terms, such as I had no reason to expect from her, for there has been a kind of estrangement between us. But I am truly glad it is at an end."

"Does her son resemble his mother, aunt?" inquired Rose.

"Very strongly," replied Lady Starkey.

"Then she must be extremely handsome," said Rose. "I should like to see her."

"I hope you will see her soon," rejoined Lady Starkey.

Rose looked at her for some explanation, but received none.

On arriving at the house in Berkeley-square, Lady Starkey's first business was to seek a private interview with her confidential servant, Mrs. Thomson, whom she found in her own room.

Mrs. Thomson was about forty, had a very pleasing expression of countenance, and was remarkably neat in her attire.

She was engaged on some needlework when her ladyship entered, but immediately laid it down and arose.

"I want your advice, Thomson," said Lady Starkey. "But first of all, I must read you this letter. It is from Mrs. Brereton to her son."

Mrs. Thomson listened to the letter and expressed her approval of it.

"I feel certain she is sincere," she said. "What she says of your ladyship is quite true, and very gratifying."

"I mean to ask her to stay with me a short time, Thomson. Do you think she will come?"

"Whether she comes or not, my lady, she cannot fail to be pleased by the invitation."

"I should like her to meet my niece," said Lady Starkey, after a moment's hesitation. "I believe Miss Rose would produce a favourable impression upon her."

"No doubt of it," replied Mrs. Thomson, who now began to comprehend her ladyship's scheme. "Miss Rose is very amiable and engaging."

"Then Mrs. Brereton shall be asked at once," said her ladyship. "I must tell you there is something more in this letter, which seems to intimate that a quarrel has taken place between Stanley and a young lady whom I fancy he admires."

"So much the better," observed Mrs. Thomson. "Now is the time to supplant her."

"Since the plan meets your approval, Thomson, I'll set about it at once."

And proceeding to her boudoir, she wrote a very kind letter inviting Mrs. Brereton to come and spend a month with her.

"You shall be as quiet as you please," she said. "I have only my niece, Rose Hylton, staying with me, a very nice, amiable girl, with whom I feel certain you will be pleased. Before concluding, let me again thank you for the kind manner in which you have spoken of me to your son."

Just as she had finished her letter, Rose came into the room, and called out:

"I am sure you have been writing to Mrs. Brereton, aunt."

"I have asked her to spend a month with me," was the reply.

"Oh! I'm so glad," cried Rose. "But do you think she'll come?"

"I hope so," replied Lady Starkey. "But Stanley will be better able than I am to answer that question."

Shortly afterwards, the young man himself made his appearance, and expressed a decided opinion that his mother would be delighted to accept the invitation.

"Then I will prepare for her," said Lady Starkey. "Here is your letter. By-the-by, I gather from the postscript—at which, perhaps, I ought not to have looked—that you are about to make some alterations in your old house."

"I intend to restore it," replied Stanley. "But I shall postpone my design for the present."

"When you do restore the old place, I hope you will preserve its original character."

"Such is my intention," said Stanley. "But Miss Warburton, who has called there since my departure, does not think it can ever be made fit to live in."

"Her tastes must differ materially from mine," said Rose. "From what I have heard of it, Brereton must be a very picturesque old place."

"So it is," replied Stanley. "I should like to show it you."

"We must run down and have a look at it, after your mother's visit," said Lady Starkey.

"I shall hold you to your promise, and I engage to adopt any suggestions you may offer."

"That's very rash," rejoined Rose. "We may recommend you to alter the dining-room, to enlarge the drawing-room, to build a new gallery, and a new staircase."

"No, I'm safe there," he replied. "Those are the best parts of the house, and only want restoring."

"Haven't you a haunted chamber?" asked Rose. "Brereton wouldn't be perfect without one."

"We are already provided with a ghost," said Stanley. "But the haunted room is now shut up, and the ghost never leaves it."

"Have you ever slept in the room?" inquired Lady Starkey.

"Not very lately," replied Stanley. "But I have occupied the large, antique, four-post bed that forms part of the original furniture of the apartment. What is more, I have seen the ghost."

"Oh! do tell us all about it," cried Rose.

"Before I begin," replied Stanley, "you ought to know that the perturbed spirit is that of the beautiful Dame Dorothy Massey, whose charms gave her a host of admirers in the days of James the First. Her husband, Sir Hubert, was very jealous, and is thought to have poisoned her. For my own part, though I had often heard of the apparition, I didn't believe in it—but, strange to say, I had never tested the truth of the story."

"One night, however, the large old bed was prepared for me, and I took possession of it."

"Not feeling any alarm, I soon fell asleep, but was awakened about an hour after midnight, as I conjectured, by some sound in the room.

"On opening my eyes I was surprised to perceive a light, and when I raised myself to see what caused it, I beheld a female figure standing near the foot of the bed.

"I knew it must be the lovely Dorothy, for we have a portrait of her in the dining-room, and the features, figure, and dress, so far as I could judge, seemed precisely similar.

"The curtains of the bed were drawn back, and the phantom appeared to gaze at me steadfastly.

"I tried to address it, but could not utter a word. After awhile it vanished, and the light died away at the same time.

"I remained quiet till morning, and have since thought that the vision might be a dream."

"Now you have spoiled your ghost story," cried Rose. "If it was nothing but a dream, I don't care for it. But we must see the haunted room, if we go to Brereton."

"So you shall," replied Stanley. "It is now shut up, as I have told you; but I will have it opened. Several persons have seen Dame Dorothy's ghost—amongst others, our old man-servant, Minshull, who, according to his own statement, spoke to it, but got no response."

Just then, Sir John Lambert was ushered in, and the footman said that luncheon was served; whereupon, Sir John gave his arm to her ladyship, and Stanley took charge of Rose.

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## XVII.

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING IN ST. JAMES'S PARK.

At luncheon, Sir John Lambert remarked that a great improvement had taken place in her ladyship's spirits.

It was quite evident that she took a strong interest in the two young people, and it struck Sir John forcibly that she wished to make up a match between them. He was not surprised at this, since Stanley was now very well off; and though

Rose had nothing to speak of—her father being a man of very moderate property, who lived upon a small estate in Sussex—he knew that her aunt had just settled 2000*l.* upon her—the exact sum, in fact, paid to her ladyship by Sir Thomas, just before his unfortunate death.

Of course, Sir John was informed that an invitation was about to be sent to Mrs. Brereton, and it was hoped she would accept it, but this only confirmed his views. He, therefore, lent all the assistance he could to the plan, and persuaded himself he was of considerable service. Lady Starkey thought so too, and encouraged him by her looks.

Thus all seemed to go well for the scheme.

And here it may be asked whether Stanley had really transferred his affections from Mildred to Rose. Only a few days ago he seemed passionately enamoured of the former, and believed that his happiness entirely depended upon her. Now he had altered his mind. And just when he had resolved to forget her he had come across Rose, who seemed exactly calculated to fill her place. Rose was quite as good-looking as Mildred, and almost as attractive, while she was entirely free from the faults of the more dazzling beauty.

Stanley was very anxious that his mother should see Rose, feeling almost certain she would prefer her to Mildred, to whom he knew she had many objections, and seriously doubted whether she would suit him.

Despite all his efforts, however, he could not entirely banish Mildred's image from his breast. She had completely fascinated him and he was not, as yet, freed from the spell.

As to Rose herself, there was no doubt she was greatly interested in her admirer, and had half lost her heart to him. She thought him exceedingly handsome, and very agreeable. Moreover, the encouragement given her by her aunt had fanned the rising flame, and raised hopes in her bosom, which might not otherwise have been indulged.

Hence, owing to the combined efforts of her ladyship and Sir John, affairs made rapid progress, and Stanley began to feel that he must pause, unless he meant decidedly to commit himself.

After luncheon, the party repaired to the drawing-room, where the same sort of talk went on for some time longer, when the gentlemen took leave, though not before Stanley had invited the ladies and Sir John to dine with him next day, at the Star and Garter, Richmond.

On quitting Berkeley-square, Stanley and the old baronet walked down Regent-street to St. James's Park, the chief subject of their discourse being Rose, concerning whom Sir John expressed himself in rapturous terms, declaring she was the nicest girl he knew.

"So I think—with one exception," replied Stanley.

"And pray who is the exception?" inquired Sir John.

"Mildred Warburton, only daughter—only child, in fact—of Squire Warburton, as we call him, of Beacliffe House, Cheshire."

"I know the old squire, and a capital fellow he is," cried Sir John. "He has often asked me to come and see him at Beacliffe, but I have never been there. And so his daughter is very handsome—eh?"

"Remarkably so," replied Stanley. "She is considered the chief beauty in Cheshire, where there are plenty of handsome girls. But, good Heavens!—what do I behold? Did I not think it quite impossible, I should say that yonder are the squire and Mildred, with their friend Lady Talmash, coming towards us."

"You are quite right," replied Sir John. "I know Mr. Warburton and Lady Talmash, and there they both are; and, of course, the pretty girl with them is the squire's daughter."

Stanley replied in the affirmative, adding that he fancied they were all in Cheshire, and could not understand how they came to be in St. James's Park.

Presently the others came up, and exclamations of surprise were uttered.

"How strange we should meet you thus!" cried the squire. "Why, we are only just arrived in town, and here we find you the very first thing?"

"It is purely accidental that I happened to be here," replied Stanley.

"At all events it's very lucky. I'm right glad to have stumbled upon you. But is not this my old friend Sir John Lambert?"

"You are right, Mr. Warburton," replied the other, "and delighted I am to see you."

Sir John then addressed himself to Lady Talmash, who seemed very much pleased to see him, after which the old baronet was presented by her father to Mildred, whom he

could not help thinking merited the eulogium just passed upon her by Stanley.

An explanation of the unlooked-for appearance of the squire and the ladies was then offered.

Mildred wanted to buy a horse, and her good-natured sire, who never refused her anything, had brought her up to town for the purpose. Lady Talmash had accompanied them at Mildred's particular request.

They had set out on the journey that very morning, and on arriving, about two hours previously, had put up at the Grosvenor Hotel.

"Where are you staying, Stanley?" asked the squire.

"At the York Hotel, Albemarle-street," replied the other.

"Well, come and dine with us at the Grosvenor, if you have no better engagement? And if you will condescend to accept so short an invitation, Sir John, I shall be most happy to see you at the same time."

The invitation was put so agreeably, that the old baronet could not refuse it, and Stanley likewise accepted.

After a little more talk, the party turned round and proceeded slowly towards the Mall, past Marlborough House towards Buckingham Palace.

Somehow or other, Stanley found himself by the side of Mildred, while the others walked on in front. He did not seek an explanation, but could not avoid it.

"Do you know that I was very angry with you when you left Beaucliffe the other day," said Mildred. "Why did you run away so suddenly—especially, when I asked you to remain? Tell me that, sir?"

"I cannot defend my conduct," replied Stanley. "But I thought you too exacting."

"I asked no more than I had a right to expect from one who professed himself devoted to me," she rejoined. "I was very much hurt by your hasty departure, I assure you, and haven't quite forgiven you yet."

"I'm sorry for that," replied Stanley. "But I don't think I was much in fault."

"You are aware that I expect implicit obedience to my commands?"

"Yes, I know you expect it," he replied. "But what if I don't feel inclined to render it?"

"Ah! did I hear aright?" she rejoined, looking at him in surprise.

"Shall I repeat what I said?" he asked.

"No occasion to do that," she replied, haughtily.

"I am almost of the same opinion," he said, "apparently, you will never be satisfied with such homage as I can tender."

"This is *not* homage, but defiance," she cried sharply. "I begin to think you no longer love me."

"It would be useless to maintain the contrary, when it is clear you won't believe me," he rejoined, coldly.

"Now I am convinced you are changed," she cried. "Don't say another word. I won't listen to you."

"As you please. But for a time, at least, let us maintain a semblance of regard."

"I don't mind that. But understand that all is at an end between us."

At this moment, a very seasonable interruption was offered by Lady Talmash, who quitted the two gentlemen and joined them.

Whether she guessed what was going on we cannot tell, but it looked very like it.

"I hope the little misunderstanding that occurred at Beaucliffe the other day, has been quite settled?" she said, turning from one to the other.

"Quite," replied Stanley.

"You don't answer, Mildred?" she remarked.

"I've nothing to say," returned the other.

"I'm afraid that *is* an answer. But do let me have the satisfaction of arranging this little quarrel, which both will regret, if it goes on. I don't know what has occurred, but I know what trifles lovers' quarrels generally are in the beginning, and how important they sometimes become in the end. I'm sure you like each other—love each other, I ought to say—so pray forget what has happened, and be friends."

"I quite appreciate the kindness of your ladyship's motives," said Stanley, "and am quite ready to obey you."

"And you, Mildred?" asked her ladyship. "What do you say?"

"If Stanley owns himself in the wrong I will forgive him, not otherwise," was the reply.

Lady Talmash looked entreatingly at the young man.

"Surely, you won't hesitate?" she said.

"No, I was very much in the wrong," he replied, "and I intended to say so."

"That's enough," cried Mildred. "Now we are friends again!"

At this moment, the two elderly gentlemen in front came to a halt.

"We must now make our way to Tattersall's," said the squire. "We have to inquire about a horse—that's our business in town. We won't ask you to accompany us, Sir John."

"I can't, or I would with pleasure," replied the old baronet.

"Come with us, and give us an opinion," said Mildred to Stanley.

"Unluckily I have an appointment in a different direction, and you are just as well without me, for my opinion about a horse is worth nothing."

"Well, we shall see you both at the Grosvenor at seven," said the squire.

The parties then separated. Mr. Warburton and the ladies proceeding along Grosvenor-place to Hyde Park Corner, and the others making their way by St. James's Palace to Pall Mall.

"The squire is as cheery as ever, I find," said Sir John. "And what a charming girl is his daughter!" I don't wonder you admire her."

"I don't admire her so much as Rose Hylton," replied Stanley.

"Humph!" exclaimed Sir John, sceptically.

"What I mean is this," said Stanley. "I am of opinion Rose would make the better wife of the two."

"There I agree with you," replied Sir John.

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## XVIII.

### TATTERSALL'S.

WHEN the party approached the famous rendezvous of racing men and turfites, they perceived a tall, pleasant-looking, fresh-complexioned personage, buttoned up tightly across his broad chest, in a dark, grey riding coat, standing near the

entrance of the subscription room, and conversing with two gentlemen, who had rather a military look.

The chief person in the group towards whom the squire's gaze was directed was Mr. Tattersall himself, who, we may mention, is not only a very good specimen of an Englishman, but a lineal descendant of the famous Captain Tattersall, who conveyed the fugitive Charles the Second in his brig the *Swiftsure*, from Shoreham to Fécamp.

The two gentlemen talking to him were our old acquaintances, Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe.

"There's Tattersall himself," exclaimed the squire. "We're very lucky in finding him here. We shall now be able to transact our business without delay."

"I'm very glad of that, papa," replied Mildred. "I feared we might be detained some time."

Mr. Tattersall came to them very quickly. Knowing the squire, and seeing he wanted to speak to him, he left the others and came to him.

Having introduced him to the ladies, the squire stated his business.

"We are just come up from Cheshire to see you, Mr. Tattersall," he said. "We understand you have a first-rate hunter to sell."

"I have several first-rate hunters to sell, Mr. Warburton," replied Tattersall, smiling. "But I can guess the horse you allude to. It is thorough-bred—without fault of any kind, and would exactly suit a lady. Perhaps it is intended for your daughter, of whose equestrian achievements I have heard much. If so, I should say it would exactly suit her."

"You are quite right, Mr. Tattersall," said Mildred. "I *do* require a horse—an accident having happened to my best hunter—and have come to you to supply my want. I know you can do so if you will."

"I shall be delighted to serve you, Miss Warburton," replied Tattersall, bowing. "The horse I have so highly commended belongs to the gentleman you see yonder—Captain Darcy. But I must tell you he wants a long price—more than you may like to give."

"What's his price, Tattersall, do you know?" said the squire.

"Three nundred," replied the other.

"By Jove! that *is* a long figure," exclaimed the squire.

"If the horse answers Mr. Tattersall's description, I *must* have it—cost what it may," said Mildred.

"I pledge my word that all I have said is correct," rejoined Tattersall.

"That's enough," cried the squire. "By-the-by, is this the Captain Darcy who shot Sir Thomas Starkey in a duel at Dieppe the other day?"

Tattersall replied in the affirmative.

"It was an unfortunate affair," he added. "And I particularly regret it, for Sir Thomas was a good friend of mine."

While this conversation took place the two officers had been looking at Mildred, and were greatly struck by her beauty.

"That's the prettiest girl I've seen for some time," said Darcy. "Who the deuce can she be?"

"Evidently the daughter of that old fellow," replied the colonel. "I think Tattersall said he is Mr. Warburton, of Beaucliffe House."

"I should like very much to know her," said Darcy.

"The stylish-looking woman with them is Lady Talmash," said the colonel. "I have a slight acquaintance with her."

Just then Tattersall came up, and, addressing Darcy, told him that Mr. Warburton would be glad to speak to him.

"I think he'll buy your famous hunter," he said. "He wants the horse for his daughter, who is the boldest and best lady rider in Cheshire."

"I've heard of her," replied Darcy. "Did you tell him my price?"

"Yes; he makes no objection," said Tattersall.

"Come on, then," said Darcy.

The two officers were then introduced to the squire and the ladies.

"We hear you have a wonderful horse to sell, Captain Darcy," said the squire.

"There isn't his match in Cheshire, Mr. Warburton, I'll answer for that," was the reply.

"Nor anywhere else," added the colonel.

"May I ask why you are parting with him?" inquired Mildred.

"Because I'm giving up hunting," said Darcy. "I grieve to part with him, but shall be reconciled to the loss if I sell him to you."

"You are very polite," replied Mildred. "But you ask a terribly long price."

"Not more than I gave," said Darcy.

"Well, if he answers to your description, we shan't quarrel about the price," said the squire. "When can we see the horse?"

"When you please," replied Darcy. "He's now in Mr. Tattersall's stables."

"Let us go and look at him at once, dear papa," cried Mildred, eagerly. "By the way, what's his name?" she added to Darcy.

"Lionel—same as my own," he replied, smiling.

The whole party then adjourned to a yard at the back of the premises, where no one was allowed to intrude at the time.

Lionel was brought out by a groom, and elicited general admiration.

"Upon my soul! I never saw a finer horse," exclaimed the squire.

"I won't say anything further in his praise," remarked Tattersall. "You are quite as good a judge of a horse as I am, squire."

"You pay me a high compliment, sir," said Mr. Warburton, much gratified.

"Not more than you deserve, sir," replied Tattersall.

"What does Miss Warburton think of him?" asked Darcy.

"I should very much like to have her opinion."

"If I praise him you won't increase the price?"

"Can you suppose it possible?" he replied.

"Well, then, I'm sure he'll suit me admirably," she said.

"I like him better than any horse I ever saw. You must buy him, dear papa!"

"Well, if I must—I must, I suppose," rejoined the squire.

"Better try him first," counselled Tattersall. "He shall be sent to where you please, to-morrow morning. You don't object, eh, captain?"

"Not in the least," replied Darcy. "Miss Warburton can give her own orders."

"Then send him to the Grosvenor Hotel at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," said Mildred.

"I must also get you to send me a horse," said the squire.

"And another perhaps for your ladyship, eh?"

"I certainly cannot be left out," said Lady Talmash.

"I can furnish you with a riding habit," said Mildred.

" Luckily, I have brought a couple with me, and I dare say one of them will fit you."

" Not a doubt of it," replied her ladyship; " we are just about the same size."

" May I be allowed to attend the party, squire?" said Darcy. " And perhaps my friend Colonel Ratcliffe may have permission likewise?"

" We shall be very glad to have you both with us," replied the squire.

It being now quite understood that if the horse answered all expectations at the proposed trial on the morrow, it was to become Mr. Warburton's at the price mentioned; the squire and the two ladies left Hyde Park Corner, and proceeded to the Grosvenor.

" Are you aware that that charming girl is an only daughter?" remarked the colonel to Darcy. " She'll have a large fortune."

" A very large fortune," echoed Tattersall. " She's a great Cheshire heiress."

" And well worth looking after," said the colonel. " But you'll have a great many rivals."

The two friends then took their departure, Darcy being well satisfied with his day's work.

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## XIX.

### RICHMOND PARK.

A VERY good dinner was given at the Grosvenor by the squire. And it was thoroughly enjoyed, at least by himself and Sir John Lambert.

Stanley and Mildred sat next to each other, but did not talk much, and there seemed a certain restraint between them, which Lady Talmash did not fail to notice, though she herself kept up a lively conversation with Mr. Warburton.

Both Stanley and Sir John were greatly surprised to learn that the squire had bought a horse for his daughter from Captain Darcy, and hoped the purchase would turn out well.

Sir John was quite aware that Darcy had a famous hunter, but he did not know that he meant to sell it. Stanley made no remark, but he was far from pleased.

Lady Talmash did her best to bring about a perfect reconciliation between the lovers, but was not entirely successful. The squire saw there was something amiss, but thought it best not to interfere.

In the course of the evening, Stanley invited the squire and the ladies to dine with him next day at the Star and Garter, Richmond, to meet Lady Starkey and her niece, and the invitation was accepted, though rather against Mildred's wish.

"This will do very well," said the squire. "We can ride through Richmond Park, and give the horse a gallop. We shall then see how he behaves. What time do you dine?"

"Early—not later than six," replied Stanley.

"Can't you ask Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe to join the party?" said Mildred to Stanley.

"Not very well," he replied. "The recent duel with Sir Thomas Starkey is a difficulty."

"Oh! yes, I see," replied Mildred. "We'll say no more about it."

Before separating, it was arranged that Stanley and Sir John should go down first to Richmond and order dinner at the Star and Garter; while the others could find their way there as they chose.

The arrangement seemed to please the squire vastly.

"Couldn't be better!" he cried, rubbing his hands. "Couldn't be better."

Next morning, at the appointed hour, the famous hunter was sent to the Grosvenor, together with two other very good-looking horses—one intended for Lady Talmash, and the other for the squire.

Both ladies were equipped for the expedition, and the riding-habit, lent to Lady Talmash by Mildred, looked as if made for her.

Enraptured at the sight of her new horse, Mildred clapped her hands with delight, crying out:

"There he is! How well he looks, papa!"

The squire was of the same opinion, and so was Lady Talmash.

Mildred was all eagerness to try him, nor had she long to wait.

Punctual to the appointment, Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe made their appearance, and leaving their horses in charge of the grooms entered the hotel.

They found the ladies and the squire in the hall, and after a general expression of satisfaction at the fineness of the day which everybody said would render the ride most agreeable, they all came forth.

The Colonel now led Lady Talmash to the horse intended for her, while Darcy, almost ceremoniously, assisted Mildred to mount.

As the young lady, whip in hand, placed herself lightly and gracefully in the saddle, the eyes of both officers were fixed upon her with admiration, and the grooms thought she looked like a picture.

In a few minutes more the whole party had mounted, and were taking their way through Knightsbridge to Kensington, headed by Darcy and his fair companion, and followed by the grooms.

The little cavalcade attracted the greatest attention as it proceeded on its course, and everybody wanted to know the name of the lovely girl riding in front.

It was quite impossible, indeed, not to be struck by Mildred's appearance on her new horse.

Never had she looked so well before—so thought her father, and so thought everybody else. The new hunter, which was very showy-looking, seemed quite proud of his fair burden, and walked with statelier step than usual.

Darcy could not help complimenting the young lady on her perfect seat on horseback.

"You must excuse me, Miss Warburton," he said, "but I cannot help telling you how well you look. Till now this horse has never been properly ridden. You sit him to perfection, and I am certain he knows you do so."

"You flatter me, Captain Darcy," she rejoined—by no means displeased.

"No; I am telling you the exact truth," he said. "A horse always knows when he has got a good rider, and I am certain Lionel feels your power, and longs to show you what he can do."

"I'll put his obedience to the test, as soon as we enter Richmond Park," she rejoined, smiling.

"I shall be very much surprised—very much disappointed

—if you don't find him everything you could wish," said Darcy. "What does your ladyship think of him?" he added, appealing to Lady Talmash.

"I think he justifies all that has been said in his praise," she replied. "He exactly suits Miss Warburton."

"Precisely my opinion," remarked Colonel Ratcliffe.

"Yes; I think my daughter *is* suited at last!" cried the squire, laughing.

Reserving any trial they intended to make for Richmond Park, the party proceeded at a leisurely pace across Hammer-smith Bridge, and did not even get beyond a walk on Barnes Common.

Mildred found some difficulty in restraining her impetuous steed, but she would not let him have his own way for the present.

At length they reached the lodge gate, and entered the park.

As we have already intimated, there could not have been a more delightful morning for a ride—bright and sunshiny—but not too warm.

The charming park was seen to the greatest advantage. The turf was in splendid condition, and seemed to invite a gallop. The trees were in full foliage, and beneath them couched both red and fallow deer—the latter being the most numerous. The sheets of water looked like lakes, and materially heightened the beauty of the picture. Nothing, in short, was wanting to render the place enjoyable, and though all three gentlemen had often been there before, they thought they had never seen the park look so enchanting.

After riding on for a couple of hundred yards, the party came to a halt. It had been decided that the trial should be made partly along the road, and partly over the turf.

First of all, a short but careful examination of the horse was made by the squire, who could not find a fault with him. These preliminaries gone through, Mildred called out: "Now for a gallop! Keep with me if you can, Captain Darcy!"

At the slightest touch possible of the whip Lionel, whose impatience had been greatly increased by the delay, started off at full speed over the turf.

Darcy found it impossible to obey the command he had received—nor could any of the others keep near the fair equestrian, who laughed as she left them behind.

Before she had gone more than half a mile the gallant captain, who did his best, had lost all chance, and the rest were nowhere.

But Mildred went on—rather increasing than slackening her pace—till she reached the skirts of the terrace, whence such a lovely view is obtained of the valley with the Thames winding through it, and Windsor Castle crowning the heights in the distance.

Here she drew in the rein, and turned round to look for her friends.

They were not far behind. Finding it impossible to keep up with her, Darcy had desisted from the attempt.

Several persons were on the terrace, surveying the charming prospect, and they loudly expressed their admiration of her performance.

Not caring for so much homage, Mildred rode back to her friends, and the whole party set off towards another part of the park.

As soon as they had got rid of the spectators, the young lady tried a second gallop, with as much success as the first.

In this instance her course led her to the widest part of the park, and here she was checked, at length, by furze bushes and ferns.

“Well, does the horse answer your expectations, Miss Warburton?” asked Darcy, as he came up.

“Surpasses them,” she replied.

“I’m truly glad to hear it,” he rejoined, “It will always be a satisfaction to me that I have been able to provide you with a horse worthy of you.”

“I shall ever feel obliged to you, I’m sure, Captain Darcy,” she replied.

Everybody thought the trial had now been quite sufficient to establish the horse’s reputation, and both Lady Talmash and Colonel Ratcliffe congratulated the young lady on her acquisition.

But not one of the party—not Mildred herself—looked better pleased than the squire. More than once have we said that nothing delighted him so much as to be able to gratify his daughter’s whims, and on this occasion he saw that he had succeeded.

But though the trial was over, the party did not quit the park. They found it so attractive that they could not tear themselves away, but rode about in different directions.

As to Darcy, he could not avoid the fate that had befallen many others in attendance on Mildred, but was compelled to submit to her fascinations.

As they had got rid of the others—together with the grooms—he thought he might venture on a little private talk with her.

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## XX.

## A DECLARATION.

"I WAS very sorry to hear, Miss Warburton," said Darcy, "that you are returning to Cheshire almost immediately. I hope it isn't true."

"We never intended to make any stay in town," she replied. "And our business will be finished to-morrow."

"So soon?" he cried.

"But we mean to call on Lady Starkey before we take our departure. We expect to meet her to-day. She is dining with her nephew, Stanley Brereton, at the Star and Garter."

"Would I were included in the party. We might possibly improve our acquaintance."

"I think I know you as well now as I should a month hence."

"Very likely. I carry my heart in my hand so that all may read it. Can you perceive nothing?"

"What would you have me perceive?" she rejoined.

"The greatest admiration of yourself. Never have I beheld any one so charming. You look incredulous, but 'tis true!"

"I shall be angry if you pay me such extravagant compliments."

"Forgive me! I wouldn't for the world offend you. But I must tell you."

"Now you are about to compliment me again. Take care!"

"No, I am going to tell you something you may not be aware of. I have fallen desperately in love with you. Can you give me any encouragement?"

"Not much," she replied, laughing. "You have really taken me quite by surprise."

"Oh, you will soon recover from that. But pray don't laugh at me! Treat what I say seriously."

"If I do, it will be to bid you cease this nonsense."

"Do you call a declaration of love nonsense?"

"The greatest nonsense," she replied. "It means nothing."

"In this case it means that I offer you my heart and hand," he rejoined with great earnestness. "I have never met with any person who produced such an effect upon me—that I swear! Speak! decide my fate!"

While this discourse took place they were passing through a small wood, and no one beheld them—at least, so Darcy thought—for while putting the all-important question he drew as near as he could to Mildred's side, and taking her hand, raised it quickly to his lips.

She instantly withdrew it.

But not before the action had been witnessed by a person on horseback, who suddenly appeared at the further end of the wood, and was greatly surprised—and indeed displeased by what he beheld.

The observer was no other than Stanley Brereton.

Having learnt at dinner, on the day before, that Mildred was about to try a horse next morning in Richmond Park, he could not resist the temptation to be present at the time.

Accordingly, he deputed Sir John Lambert to order dinner at the Star and Garter, and came down alone to Richmond Park.

And this was what he beheld. If he could trust his eyes Darcy was now a favoured suitor.

Feeling sure he must be in the way, Stanley was about to retire instantly, when Mildred called to him to come on, and he obeyed.

On approaching her he bowed, and haughtily saluted Darcy.

"I fear I am in the way," he said. "But it was not my intention to intrude."

"You certainly are unexpected, but I'm very glad to see you. Is Lady Starkey here?"

"Somewhere, I believe," he replied, "in the park, but I've not seen her."

"We must try and find her," replied Mildred.

"But for this plaguy young fellow's appearance, my destiny might have been decided," whispered Darcy.

"Not as you seem to desire," she rejoined.

And they rode on.

On emerging from the wood, they perceived Lady Starkey's brougham coming towards them with her ladyship and Rose inside.

Darcy rode on first, and as he approached, the brougham stopped.

Thus left alone with Stanley for a few moments, Mildred endeavoured to explain what had just occurred, but he would not listen to her.

"Come, and let me present you to Lady Starkey and her niece," he said.

The introduction then took place, and both parties seemed mutually pleased. If Rose was struck by Mildred's beauty and graceful horsemanship, Mildred was no less surprised by Rose's good looks, for which she had not been prepared.

"I hope you like your new horse, Miss Warburton," said Lady Starkey. "He seems to suit you perfectly."

"I am delighted with him," replied Mildred. "He has gone through his trial admirably. All my wants are now supplied."

"All?" cried Darcy, who was not far off.

"Yes, all," she replied. "You ride, I suppose, Miss Hylton?"

"No," replied the other. "I have no horse."

"What say you to a walk?" remarked Lady Starkey to her niece. "We have been shut up in the brougham long enough."

Rose delightedly assented, and the two ladies came forth.

"Where shall we bend our steps?" cried Rose.

"You can't go wrong," said Stanley. "But I should advise you to shape your course towards the water yonder."

While these arrangements were being made, the rest of the party came up, and a general introduction took place. Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash seemed mutually pleased with each other, and Rose Hylton produced a favourable impression, except on Mildred. The squire seemed quite elated when Lady Starkey said she recollected him several years ago.

All those on horseback now dismounted, and committed their steeds to the care of the grooms, and the whole party walked towards the ponds.

The two ladies in riding-habits could not get on quite so

fast as the others, and Darcy once more found himself by the side of Mildred.

But Lady Talmash had received a hint, and kept near them.

"Lady Starkey's niece, Miss Hylton, is a very pretty girl," remarked Mildred.

"I hear people say so," replied Darcy; "but I can't discover her charms."

"You have the reputation of being a general admirer, Captain Darcy," said Lady Talmash.

"I scarcely think I merit the title," he rejoined, laughing.

"Despite your disclaimer, I believe my information is correct," said her ladyship. "I am told you are struck by every fresh face—always falling in love—yet most inconstant."

"You give me a very bad character," he replied. "Don't heed what her ladyship says," he added to Mildred.

"I intend it as a caution," said Lady Talmash.

"And I take it as such," replied Mildred.

"I would recommend your ladyship to give a similar caution to another young lady," said Darcy. "Rose Hylton seems very much interested in what Stanley Brereton is saying to her."

"What *can* he be saying?" cried Mildred.

"Making love, of course," replied Darcy. "Lady Starkey has left them. It's a regular tête-à-tête."

The temptation to interrupt it was irresistible, and Mildred stepped quickly forward. Lady Talmash called to her to stop, but she paid no attention to what she said.

No doubt the two young people were annoyed, but they were obliged to cease their converse when Mildred came up.

"Now, you have paid me off for my interruption in the wood," said Stanley.

"You were quite mistaken in your notions then, as I told you," replied Mildred. "But if I am in the way I'll leave you instantly."

"No, pray don't," cried Rose. "We have no secrets."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked Mildred.

"I was just remarking how much I should like Pembroke Lodge as a residence."

"But I don't think Lord Russell will let you have it," replied Stanley.

"It would be so enchanting to have those lovely herds of deer always in sight," continued Rose.

"I think the deer at Beaucliffe are quite as fine as these," said Mildred; "and I am sure the hall is a vast deal more picturesque than Pembroke Lodge, to say nothing of the park. Once upon a time you used greatly to admire the place," she added," to Stanley.

"I admire it still," he replied. "But you don't care for Brereton, and wouldn't like to live there."

"Who told you so?" she asked.

"A little bird that builds near the house," he replied.

"I shouldn't like it in its present state. But you mean to restore it—don't you?"

"I'm not sure. Lady Starkey and Miss Hylton are coming down to look at the old place, and then I shall decide."

"I feel convinced I shall like the house as it is," said Rose.

"Don't be too sure," rejoined Mildred. "It is really an old tumble-down place, as you will find."

"But very picturesque, notwithstanding," said Stanley.

"That is what I bargain for," rejoined Rose. "Pembroke Lodge is too modern, too comfortable, too perfect. Give me the old mansion, and let me have the pleasure of repairing it."

Mildred said nothing more, but left them, and joined Lady Starkey and her father.

The party remained near the pond for some time, and then proceeded to the terrace.

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## XXI.

### A DINNER AT THE STAR AND GARTER.

OF all the charming places in the neighbourhood of town, where a good dinner can be had, none is so pleasant as the Star and Garter at Richmond.

The situation of the hotel is perfect, and the view it commands of Twickenham and the valley of the Thames from the large bow-windows, unrivalled. Then the garden with its smooth-shaven lawns and slopes is most attractive. As to the cuisine, we need not say much in its praise, since it is well

known that no better dinner can be obtained either at Saint Germain, or elsewhere, than at this admirable house.

The visitors to the Star and Garter on the present occasion were favoured with remarkably fine weather, so that nothing more could be desired, and Sir John Lambert, who had arrived in good time, had taken care to order a first-rate dinner, with the best brand of champagne, and other light wines, and he felt quite certain his injunctions would be attended to carefully.

"Let us have whitebait—both plain and devilled," he said "and let the champagne be introduced early. As to the rest of the dinner, I leave it to you."

"You may depend upon a first-rate dinner, Sir John," said the manager.

"Place the table in the bow window of the upper room, and let covers be laid for ten," said Sir John.

"Your orders shall be strictly attended to," replied the manager.

Having got a notion that Stanley would not invite Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe to the dinner, Sir John resolved to ask them himself.

Accordingly, when the party arrived at the hotel, he went up at once to the two gentlemen in question and expressed a hope that they would dine with him.

Both accepted, and the little difficulty was got over very satisfactorily.

Darcy would have been much annoyed if he had been left out of the party, and he took care to acquaint Mildred with the invitation he had received from the old baronet.

Having mounted to the large upper room, where they proposed to dine, and gazed at the charming view spreading out before them, they returned to the garden, where some of them contrived to pass the time very agreeably.

At a suggestion from Mildred, half a dozen of the party walked down to the Thames, where they hired a boat, and went out for a row, the oars being taken by Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe, and very well managed. The others who joined in this pleasant little trip were Lady Talmash, Stanley, and Rose.

The ladies were in tip-top spirits, and their light laughter enchanted all who heard them.

One of the chief *agrémens* of Richmond is the river, and no

visit to this charming locality can be considered complete without a row.

Lady Talmash, who acted as a sort of chaperon to Mildred, noticed that Darcy had rather risen in favour with the young lady, but she did not deem it necessary to interfere. As to Stanley, he devoted himself entirely to Rose.

After spending an hour on the water in the most enjoyable manner, the party returned towards the landing-place, when Mildred perceiving her father and Lady Starkey on the bank, sprang upon one of the seats, and in doing so, missed her footing, and slipped over the side of the boat.

In an instant all was consternation; nor was the accident without danger, since the river was deep in this part, but the young lady had not disappeared, Stanley seized hold of her, and held her up till she could be lifted into the boat.

Mr. Warburton and Lady Starkey, who had witnessed the accident from the bank, were greatly alarmed, and the ladies in the boat were much terrified, but Mildred did not lose her self-possession.

"I don't think I should have been drowned," she cried, as she made her re-appearance in the boat, "for I am a tolerably good swimmer. The chief risk was my riding-habit, which might have weighed me down."

While sincere congratulations were offered on her escape, the boat was rowed quickly to the landing-place, where it was met by the squire, who was much agitated.

Notwithstanding the dripping state of her dress, he tenderly embraced his daughter, and thanked Stanley warmly for the efficient aid he had rendered.

As soon as possible a carriage was procured, and Lady Talmash went with her friend to the hotel, where a change of dress was obtained without difficulty, and this being put on she seemed none the worse for the accident.

In fact, the occurrence, being unattended by any serious consequences, caused no alteration in the dinner-hour, or any other arrangements; while the young lady's spirits were not affected in the slightest degree.

Sir John had talked a good deal about the dinner, which quite answered his expectations. The table was ornamented with choice flowers, and looked very gay and attractive. The squire thought the whitebait delicious. We must bear in mind that country gentlemen don't get these delicacies quite

as often as we Londoners do, and therefore think more of them.

"I had quite forgotten the taste of whitebait," he said; "but it's all come back, and I declare there is nothing like it."

But he found there was something new reserved for him. Exquisite as was the fried fish, the devilled whitebait was still better, and when the waiter brought round the dish he could not resist helping himself a second time.

Sir John, likewise, made a remark that might be accepted as a culinary aphorism, "Never is a glass of iced champagne so good as after whitebait."

"I am entirely of that opinion," said the squire, "and therefore, I shall take another."

It is not our intention to go through the whole of the dinner, though we could easily do so, and yet not mention a single inferior dish. But we may say that the stewed eels were wonderful, and again brought the two old gentlemen to the fore. Even Lady Starkey could not resist them. However, we shall pass on to the ices, which were such as only this house can produce, and to those exquisite little cakes, known as maids-of-honour, which attracted all the ladies, and some of the gentlemen as well.

"I have to return you my thanks for this capital dinner," said the squire. "There hasn't been a single mistake. If I ever give a dinner here I'll get you to order it for me."

"I'll do it with pleasure," said the old baronet. "I dare say I've given a hundred dinners in this house, and never recollect a failure."

The company now began to prepare for departure. The horses were ordered, and Lady Starkey told Sir John she would take him to town, if he could manage to ride with her and Rose. The old baronet thankfully accepted.

Once more, Mildred had to put on her riding-habit, which by this time had been thoroughly dried.

Before they set out on the ride back, Mildred said to Stanley, "I haven't thanked you half enough for helping me out of the river. Come and breakfast with us to-morrow morning at the Grosvenor, and give me an opportunity of doing so."

"With pleasure," replied Stanley.

Before this, Lady Starkey, with her niece and Sir John had

set off in the brougham, and all the rest of the party now started, followed by the grooms, as in the morning.

Mildred was quite delighted to find herself once more on the back of her famous hunter, and only regretted that she was compelled to proceed at such slow pace.

"As it happens to be such a fine night, there seems no reason why we shouldn't get on," she cried. "What say you, papa?"

"I object to it," he replied. "I cannot allow you to scamper off. Keep near me."

So Mildred was obliged to control her impatience.

Darcy, however, continued to get on her other side, and since Lady Talmash was constantly engaged in conversation with the squire, he had plenty of opportunity of talking to the young lady.

Though he had been disappointed more than once in the course of the day, he thought he should now be able to make up for all previous ill success. But Mildred was better watched than he supposed. Lady Talmash had very quick ears, and whenever she thought he was putting a question that had better not be answered, she gave the squire a hint, and there was an end of it.

Stanley rode at the back with Colonel Ratcliffe.

As far as could be judged, he had not quite recovered from the declaration he had heard in the wood. Whether he should be reinstated as one of Mildred's suitors, he couldn't tell. He thought not.

On arriving in town the squire proceeded at once to the Grosvenor, where all the horses—except Stanley's, which was from a different stable—were delivered to the grooms.

While bidding good-night to Darcy, the squire told him he would call at Tattersall's next morning to settle matters. A singular smile played on Darcy's countenance, but he made no remark.

## XXII.

## MRS. BRERETON ARRIVES IN TOWN.

OWING, perhaps, to her unlooked for bath in the Thames, Mildred felt a good deal fatigued next morning. Still, she managed to make her appearance at nine o'clock, the hour appointed for breakfast, and very soon afterwards, the whole party, including Stanley, were assembled.

An excellent breakfast was placed before them—tea and coffee, with broiled fish and broiled ham—and the two gentlemen seemed disposed to do justice to it. But the squire had only just helped himself to a slice of broiled salmon when he called out:

"I hope I shall be able to settle my business to-day, so that we may go back to Beacliffe to-morrow at the latest."

"I'm in no hurry whatever to leave town, papa," said Mildred. "I've enjoyed myself so much since I've been here that I should like to stay a few days longer."

"Oh, you can't do that," replied the squire. "I don't mind giving you to-day; but I won't promise you to-morrow. What says your ladyship? Are you anxious to remain here?"

"I think I should like to stop another day," said Lady Talmash, consulting Mildred by a look.

"Well, then, we'll leave to-morrow," said the squire. "And perhaps we may be able to find our way to Greenwich and get some more fish and whitebait. I hope you will dine with us, Stanley, and pray bring with you Lady Starkey and Miss Hyton!"

"I will deliver your invitation, sir, and I have no doubt they will accept it. But I think it not at all improbable my mother may be here to-day."

"What, is your mother coming up?"

"She is," replied Stanley.

"Then I really think we must stop another day," said the squire.

A great deal of pleasant chat took place at the breakfast.

It might be a mistake, but Stanley thought Mildred was anxious to make up her quarrel with him, and it was quite certain that Lady Talmash would be glad to effect a reconciliation between the former lovers. But Stanley had become very unlike his former self, and made no advance. That Rose Hylton had gained possession of his heart was not absolutely certain, but Mildred thought so. Be that as it might, she determined to win it back again.

Breakfast over, the squire announced his plans for the day. "In the first place," he said, "I intend to go and pay for the horse. You can then do what you like with it, but I would advise you to leave it at Tattersall's stables. As I am merely going to Hyde Park Corner on business, I shan't take you with me, but I advise you to go and call on Lady Starkey in Berkeley-square. If her ladyship and her niece will dine with us at Blackwall I shall be delighted. Don't wait for me. I shall go down by one of the steamers, and will order dinner as soon as I arrive. For you, Mildred, I have a special injunction. Should you meet Sir John Lambert at Lady Starkey's, pray ask him to dine with us. I shall be terribly disappointed if you don't see him."

"Make yourself perfectly easy on that score," said Stanley. "I'll engage to find him, and deliver the invitation, and I'm quite certain he'll come."

Soon after this, the squire set off to Tattersall's, having his cheque-book in his pocket, with the intention of paying for the horse.

But we do not mean to follow him. Our way lies towards Berkeley-square, for it is to Lady Starkey's charming house that three of our friends are bound.

As soon as the door was thrown open, and Stanley perceived Minshull in the hall, he felt certain his mother had arrived, and so it proved, for on questioning the old man-servant, he learnt that Mrs. Brereton had arrived tolerably early on the previous evening, and had not been much fatigued by the journey.

"Where are the ladies?" demanded Stanley.

"They have just finished breakfast, sir," replied Minshull, "and are now in her ladyship's boudoir."

While these inquiries were answered, a footman had been waiting to conduct them to the ladies, and he now fulfilled his duties.

As they entered the boudoir, Lady Starkey rose to welcome them, and Stanley perceived his mother seated on a sofa with Rose. She looked none the worse for the journey—in fact, the exertion had roused her up, and done her good.

“How long is it since you were last in town?” said Stanley.

“I can scarcely tell you,” she replied. “But it’s a great many years ago, and I never expected to be here again. But I couldn’t resist Lady Starkey’s kind invitation.”

“And very glad I am to see you,” said her ladyship.

“We’re all in town just now, you see, Mrs. Brereton,” said Mildred; “and enjoying ourselves immensely.”

“To say nothing of an occasional tumble into the river,” rejoined Mrs. Brereton. “I’ve already heard of your accident.”

“Luckily, it wasn’t attended by any unpleasant consequences. I didn’t even catch cold. Papa wants you to dine with him at Greenwich to-day, Lady Starkey, and bring your party with you, and I hope you will.”

“With much pleasure,” replied her ladyship, consulting the others.

“I have been to Richmond, when I was quite young,” said Mrs. Brereton; “but not to Greenwich, so the trip will be something quite new to me. In fact, I have so much to see that I scarcely know where to begin, and as yet I haven’t caught a glimpse of the Thames.”

“Then you may expect to be greatly amused by what you will see from the steamboat,” said Lady Talmash.

Just then, Sir John Lambert made his appearance. He was heartily welcomed by all, but being a stranger to Mrs. Brereton, he had to be presented to her by her son. He then had a little talk to her, and found her very chatty and agreeable.

“Now, Sir John,” said Mildred, coming up to him, “I must give you an invitation which cannot be refused. In fact, it is a command. You *must* dine with us to-day at Greenwich—to meet the rest of the party.”

“That I will with the greatest pleasure, my dear,” he replied. “But are we to have precisely the same party we had yesterday?”

“We have already got one new guest,” replied Mildred. “But I shouldn’t at all be surprised if papa were to ask Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe. He is sure to meet them at Tattersall’s.”

"And sure to invite them, I think, though he declared he wouldn't," said Stanley. "Besides, you can't object," he added, lowering his voice, "Captain Darcy is now an established admirer of yours."

"Nothing of the kind," she replied.

Shortly afterwards, to the great surprise of his daughter and Lady Talmash, the squire made his appearance.

"Has something happened, papa, that we see you here?" cried Mildred.

"I'll attend to you in a minute," replied the squire.

And after he had paid his respects to all the ladies, and shaken hands very heartily with Sir John Lambert, he took his daughter and Lady Talmash aside, and said to them :

"Now, I'll tell you why I came here in such a desperate hurry. What do you think? Captain Darcy wishes to present you with his famous hunter. Tattersall refused to accept the cheque for three hundred pounds that I offered him, and said I owed him nothing. He then told me that Captain Darcy intended to present the horse to my daughter. While I was trying to recover from my surprise at this information, Darcy made his appearance with his faithful friend, Colonel Ratcliffe, and, in very complimentary terms, begged permission to offer you the horse. I thanked him very much, but declined. However, he said it would be a great disappointment to him, and begged me to consider the matter. Since he urged it so much, I said I would consult you."

"Well, you have consulted me, dear papa," said Mildred, "and I answer that I won't accept the horse as a gift. I'll buy it—or rather, you'll buy it—but I couldn't be beholden to Captain Darcy for such a present."

"Quite right," said Lady Talmash. "You can't accept the horse."

"I won't," said Mildred.

"I am very glad you have come to that determination said the squire.

They were still talking over the matter when Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe arrived, and shook hands with Lady Starkey. Darcy then went up to Mildred and said :

"I cannot make up my mind to sell you my horse. I trust you will allow me to present him to you?"

"Impossible!" she replied, in a decided tone.

The response was heard by all the room.

Darcy looked a good deal confused.

"You are needlessly punctilious," he said. "I am sure I know a dozen girls who would accept the horse from me."

"That may be," said Lady Talmash; "but I think Miss Warburton quite right. She cannot consent to be under so great an obligation to you."

"If that is your ladyship's real opinion, I will say no more," replied Darcy; "however mortified I may be at the refusal."

"And I trust you will allow me to pay you the cheque for three hundred pounds, which I have drawn out?" said the squire.

"Yes, yes, you must take it," cried Colonel Ratcliffe.

"I yield, since everybody is against me," replied Darcy.

And with a reproachful look at Mildred, he put the cheque in his waistcoat pocket.

The squire made no difference in his manner towards Darcy after this incident, though he didn't like it.

In fact, as soon as the matter was settled, he asked him and Colonel Ratcliffe to dinner at Greenwich.

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## XXIII.

### A DINNER AT GREENWICH.

LATER in the day, all the ladies, attended by Sir John Lambert and Stanley, set out by steamboat to Greenwich.

The squire had gone on by himself to order dinner, and Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe meant to follow by rail.

As the steamer in which the ladies had embarked was by no means full, they all remained on deck, and greatly enjoyed the excursion.

The crowded state of the river, the various objects to be seen on either side, the magnificent new embankment (the greatest of modern metropolitan improvements), the noble bridges, St. Paul's, the Tower, and other buildings, which, though scarcely noticed by the ordinary Londoner, have a

special attraction to country-folk—these gave them plenty to look at and talk about, till the magnificent hospital was reached.

So far from finding the trip tedious, they were quite sorry when it was ended.

On landing, the party walked for a short time upon the terrace, and examined the obelisk, after which Sir John Lambert led them to the Painted Hall.

We shall content ourselves by saying that they found more than enough to occupy them for an hour, and after this brief inspection they proceeded to the park, where they spent another hour to their entire satisfaction.

Old Minshull had been permitted to attend his mistress on this trip, and to him it was a wonderful treat. Often had he dreamed of Greenwich Hospital, but never expected to behold it. Now the vision was realised.

Owing to the absence of the other gentlemen, the care of the ladies necessarily devolved on Sir John Lambert and Stanley. Sir John, who was acquainted with everything worth seeing about town, proved himself an excellent cicerone, and Stanley did his best.

The weather was quite as fine as it had been on the previous day, so that the park was most enjoyable, and all the distant views could be seen.

On the question being put to her by Stanley, Rose declared she didn't know which she liked best—Richmond or Greenwich—both were enchanting. Mildred unhesitatingly decided in favour of Richmond.

They were still lingering in the park, seated on the side of a hill, commanding a lovely and most extensive prospect, when they were joined by the squire, who had got through all his business very satisfactorily—had secured a good room looking on the river, at the principal hotel, and had ordered the best fish dinner that could be produced. Evidently, the looks and manner of the country gentleman had propitiated the manager of the hotel, who treated him with profound respect, and told him that if he had been the Lord Mayor himself, his commands would not have been more carefully attended to. All matters that had bothered our worthy friend during the morning had long since subsided, and he was now extremely cheerful.

Seating himself on the grass between Lady Starkey and

Mrs. Brereton, he began to look around, and lifted up his hands with wonder and delight.

"I don't think I ever beheld a scene, even in Cheshire, that pleased me more than this!" he exclaimed.

"I am quite of the same opinion, Mr. Warburton," said Mrs. Brereton.

Then, noticing old Minshull standing at no great distance, gazing rapturously at the prospect, she asked his opinion.

"I can't express my feelings, ma'am," replied the old man. "But while reflecting that it is the great river Thames I behold, I am struck with amazement."

"A very good answer, Minshull," said the squire. "That consideration makes the view so striking. From no other hill in England—perhaps, none in the world—can such a prospect be contemplated. Nowhere else can such magnificent docks be seen as yonder—nor such splendid ships, and such a fine arsenal."

Nothing could be pleasanter than the position taken up by the party, and they had not quitted it, when Captain Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe entered the park, and speedily discovering their friends, made their way to them.

Placing himself, without ceremony, beside Mildred, Darcy at once commenced an animated conversation with her—hoping all was now right, and expressing his infinite regret at the unintentional annoyance he had caused her.

"I shall know how to conduct myself in future," he said. "I didn't think you were so particular; and I couldn't possibly imagine you would object to such a trifling present."

"Do you call that valuable horse a trifling present?" she remarked. "However, we've agreed to let the subject drop."

"But understand that my sole desire was to please you," said Darcy, with an expression of great humility, "and if I have been guilty of an error, it has been purely unintentional. I ought certainly to have consulted you before acting as I did. But I really and truly thought you would be pleased."

This was said with such an air of penitent devotion that Mildred could not but forgive him.

Just then the squire looked at his watch, and informed his friends that it was time to proceed to dinner.

Thereupon all were quickly in motion, and led by the squire, who took charge of Lady Starkey, the whole party moved off towards the hotel.

Darcy had contrived to obtain Mildred's arm, and did not mean to surrender it. Sir John Lambert selected Lady Talmash, Colonel Ratcliffe took Mrs. Brereton, and Stanley was made happy by the possession of Rose.

Thus agreeably arranged, the party could not be otherwise than cheerful.

A large room with windows looking upon the river had been selected, and the table was remarkably well set out—an unwonted display of plate and glass being made.

The dinner commenced with turtle soup, and it proved so good that a second supply was required. Punch was offered to the gentlemen, and in no instance refused, but the pleasant beverage did not find favour with the ladies, who rejected it in favour of well-iced champagne.

All fish dinners seem alike, but there is an immense difference in the actual entertainment. On this occasion every dish was meritorious, and several were so good that two of our elderly friends ran some risk of repletion. The white-bait was perfection—both plain and devilled—and, in this case, the palm of merit was assigned to Greenwich. Of the rest of the dinner we can speak very highly, but its great triumphs consisted in the fish. Even at Amsterdam, turbot, salmon, soles, whittings, lobsters, lampreys, and oysters were never better dressed than on this occasion. The only wines served were champagne and hock—both being super-excellent.

At the close of the repast, the company returned to town by rail.

Lady Starkey and her friends were taken to Berkeley-square by Sir John Lambert and Stanley, while Darcy and Colonel Ratcliffe insisted on attending Lady Talmash and Mildred to the Grosvenor.

On taking leave of the squire, both these gentlemen were very particular in thanking him for what they termed “the best fish dinner they had ever eaten.”

They did not enter the hotel—though they were asked to do—everything had been said that it was safe to say on the railway, but Darcy obtained permission to call on the ladies next day.

As the two officers walked across St. James's Park to their club, Darcy remarked, “I think I have now completely reinstated myself, both with father and daughter.”

“Yes, I think you have,” replied the colonel. “But pro-

ceed cautiously. You will never win her if you commit a second error. Try and make a friend of Lady Talmash."

"I despair of doing so," replied Darcy. "She favours Stanley Brereton."

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## XXIV.

### HOW DARCY WAS RECEIVED NEXT MORNING.

TRUE to his appointment, Darcy presented himself next morning at the Grosvenor.

The squire had gone out, but the ladies, who were attired for a walk, received him in a very friendly manner.

Mildred seemed to like his society, but not more than that of half a dozen other young men whom she had held in her fetters, and who were now happily released.

Mildred's fault was in giving her admirers too much encouragement at first, and then suddenly throwing them over in favour of a new pretendant. So fascinating was she, when she chose, and she almost always chose to be fascinating, that few could resist her.

Perhaps the only person who had really produced an impression on her volatile heart was Stanley Brereton, and, until very recently, he had no chance whatever of obtaining her hand. But by an unaccountable perversity, ever since his position had been so unexpectedly improved, she had become apparently indifferent to him. Apparently, we say, because such was not, in reality the case, but the feigned coolness produced just the same effect as the true on Stanley's highly susceptible temperament.

Darcy had tact enough to discover this, and though he had met with no opposition from Stanley, he recognised in him a dangerous rival.

On the morning in question, as we have stated, Darcy was received with every mark of favour, and considered his case progressing most satisfactorily, but he was mistaken. He had not arrived more than five minutes, and was chatting most

agreeably, when Mildred suddenly rose, and glancing rather significantly at Lady Talmash, quitted the room.

Fancying she would return immediately, Darcy did not seem to notice her departure, but he was not long left in doubt.

Assuming a different manner, Lady Talmash said to him :

"I'm glad you came this morning. I have something to say to you about Miss Warburton."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Darcy, alarmed at this commencement, though he took care not to manifest his uneasiness.

Lady Talmash paused for a moment to give effect to her words, looking very calm and collected, and then observed :

"I think I am not wrong in assuming that you admire Miss Warburton?"

"Certainly not," said Darcy, "I admire her exceedingly. She has produced a stronger effect upon me than anyone of your sex ever did before. It is my intention to solicit her hand in due form from her father, and I trust he won't refuse it me."

"Have you obtained the young lady's consent to that step?" asked her ladyship.

"Not exactly," he replied. "But I do not imagine she will refuse permission."

"Had you not better clearly ascertain the point?" said Lady Talmash. "My own opinion is that the step would not be entirely agreeable to her. In plain terms, however flattered she might be, she would not be disposed to accept the offer."

Quite astounded, Darcy began to think her ladyship must be employed to give him a refusal. He therefore resolved to change his tactics, and said :

"Pray understand me, dear Lady Talmash. I have conceived the strongest passion for your beautiful friend, Mildred Warburton. Her charms have positively bewitched me—and a refusal on her part would drive me to distraction. Have some pity upon me, and help me! You may do so without fear. I will do my best to make your charming friend happy; and I am quite sure I can do so. I will become the most devoted husband——"

"You promise great things," interrupted Lady Talmash, smiling. "All men do so. But women are excessively foolish who believe them."

"Does your ladyship doubt what I assert?" he cried, half angrily.

"No," she replied; "you mean it now, but you will change hereafter. Mildred has consulted me on this subject, and I have given her my frank opinion. I do not think even she, beautiful and attractive as she is, and she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld—could keep you constant."

"You are entirely mistaken in me," cried Darcy. "My future happiness, I feel, is so entirely dependent upon her, that I will do aught to obtain her."

"Promise everything?"

"Yes, and fulfil all my promises!" he cried. "I see my word is doubted, but I think I could convince her of my sincerity. I hope I am not to be dismissed without a hearing."

"Nothing could be gained by an interview," said Lady Talmash.

"I think otherwise," he replied, "I am sure the opinion she has formed of me—owing to some misrepresentation—would be altered."

"I cannot recommend an interview. I do not think it would lead to any good," said her ladyship.

At this moment the door opened, and Mildred entered the room.

Darcy seemed disposed to rush forward, and throw himself at her feet, but her looks checked him.

She seemed perfectly calm and unmoved.

"Lady Talmash, I suppose, has acquainted you with my sentiments?" she said.

"I can scarcely believe they are your sentiments," he replied. "Do you absolutely reject my suit?"

"I have discovered that I do not like you sufficiently to marry you," she replied, unhesitatingly.

"Then why give me so much encouragement?" he cried. "It was scarcely fair. I had a right to presume upon it; and no wonder I did so."

"I tell you frankly I have changed my mind," she replied, without any alteration of manner. "I do not think I should be happy with you."

"Give me your reason for this opinion," he cried. "Is it your own, or another's?" he added significantly.

"You have no right to ask that question," interposed

Lady Talmash. "It is sufficient that Miss Warburton has adopted the opinion."

"Pardon me, I don't think so," responded Darcy. "I should like to know whether or not she has been influenced in her feelings towards me."

"I will answer the question positively myself," said Mildred. "I certainly did entertain a liking for you—nothing more—mind you. Your present of the horse alarmed me. I knew what would follow. I then consulted my heart, and found I could not accept you."

"And this is the fact?" asked Darcy, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"It is," she replied.

"I certainly think you have been trifling with me," he rejoined. "But never mind! I must bear the rejection as well as I can. If I am rightly informed I am not the first who has suffered. But what is to follow? Are we to remain friends?"

"Friends, of course," replied Mildred, smiling. "But upon this clear understanding."

"No more love-making," said Lady Talmash.

"Very well; I accept," said Darcy.

As the words were uttered, the squire entered the room.

Most probably, he knew what was about to occur, and had got out of the way. Be that as it might, he went up to Darcy as if nothing had happened, and shook hands with him in his usual friendly manner.

"We are going to try our new horse in the park this afternoon," he said.

"Ah! I shall never meet with such another," said Darcy. "I declare positively I would only have sold the horse to Miss Warburton."

"You appear to repent what you have done," said Mildred, in a tone of pity. "You shall have him back again, if you will."

"No, no!" cried Darcy. "I can't do that."

And bowing to them, he rather hastily quitted the room.

"Well, that little affair is settled, eh?" said the squire, with a very droll expression of countenance.

"Quite," replied Lady Talmash. "And very satisfactorily settled, in my opinion."

## XXV.

LADY STARKEY EXPLAINS HER INTENTIONS IN REGARD  
TO ROSE.

THE ladies at the house in Berkeley-square have just finished breakfast.

Rose has quitted the room, but Lady Starkey has detained Mrs. Brereton, because she wishes to have a little private talk with her.

"Now, dear Mrs. Brereton," said her ladyship, "do, pray, tell me what you think of my niece? I shall be very much surprised—very much disappointed—if you don't like her."

"She is a very lovable girl," replied Mrs. Brereton, emphatically. "As far as I can perceive she hasn't a fault. Moreover, she is uncommonly pretty."

"She really deserves the commendation you bestow upon her," said Lady Starkey, greatly pleased. "She is most amiable, and I love her as much as if she were my own daughter. My motive for asking your opinion of the dear girl is this. I fancy a feeling of regard, very likely to become a lasting attachment, has already sprung up between her and Stanley; and I really think she would make him an excellent wife—far better than that fascinating coquette, Mildred Warburton."

"Such is my own opinion," replied Mrs. Brereton. "But you needn't give yourself any concern on that score. No union is ever likely to occur between Stanley and Mildred. She is willing to flirt with him, but nothing more. Even when there did not seem the slightest chance of obtaining her hand, she gave him encouragement. Mildred has always some new admirer. Yesterday I observed Captain Darcy was the favourite, but it wouldn't surprise me if she dismissed him to-day."

"I hope not," exclaimed Lady Starkey. "In that case Stanley might be lured back again."

"I don't think so," replied Mrs. Brereton. "He appears to have been slighted, and his proud spirit will never

brook that. No, I fancy he will now devote himself exclusively to Rose, and with a little assistance on your ladyship's part, a match may very easily be brought about between them."

"Such is my earnest desire," said Lady Starkey. It is my firm belief they would be extremely happy together, and Sir John Lambert is of the same opinion, or I wouldn't for the world encourage the scheme."

She paused for a moment then added: "You quite understand, I believe, dear Mrs. Brereton, that I regard my darling Rose as a daughter."

"I cannot doubt your ladyship's intentions towards her," replied Mrs. Brereton. "And I really think she deserves your kindness."

"Rose will have all my property," said Lady Starkey. "I wished to give you that assurance."

"She deserves her good fortune," said Mrs. Brereton, scarcely able to conceal her satisfaction. "Your ladyship may calculate on my best aid. I should be truly rejoiced to see my son so well wedded."

"Should the marriage take place, I hope and trust it may turn out well," said Lady Starkey, with a sigh, caused by some painful recollections. "Never did woman love her husband more fondly than I loved Sir Thomas—and yet—"

"Pray don't think of it, dearest Lady Starkey," interrupted Mrs. Brereton. "Stanley is very differently constituted from his unfortunate uncle. His nature is extremely affectionate, and I am certain he will make a devoted husband. If I doubted it, I should not desire to see him married—especially to such a charming girl as Rose—for it would kill me, if he made her unhappy. But there is no fear of that."

"I trust not," sighed Lady Starkey. "But let us go upstairs."

Thereupon, they proceeded to the boudoir, where they found Rose, who was engaged on some little feminine employment. She welcomed them with smiles.

"Well, my love," said Lady Starkey, "I think we must be quiet to-day."

Rose did not seem at all surprised by the intimation, but simply remarked, "I suppose we shall drive out as usual?"

"Oh, yes! we shall drive in the park in the afternoon—of course," said Lady Starkey. "Mrs. Brereton will be amused

by seeing the company and equipages. I wonder Stanley has not made his appearance. He said he should be here early."

And as she spoke, the young man himself entered the room."

"Oh! here you are!" he exclaimed. "I expected to find you at breakfast. I hope you are not all tired to death?"

"We are not in the least tired," replied Rose. "How could you suppose it possible, when we passed our time so agreeably?"

"Well, can you stand such another day, do you think?" inquired Stanley, laughing.

"Oh! dear no," cried both her ladyship and Mrs. Brereton.

"We must have some rest. Would you kill us?"

"Not quite," replied Stanley. "But I thought you might like an excursion to Hampton Court or Windsor."

"A week hence we might think of it; but not now," replied Lady Starkey.

Rose made no remark, but she didn't seem to agree with her aunt.

"In less than a week the Warburtons and Lady Talmash will have left town," said Stanley.

"We can't sacrifice ourselves to please them, much as we like them," said Lady Starkey. "Besides, I don't wish Rose to go out every day on a pleasure party."

"Very proper," echoed Mrs. Brereton.

"But this was to be a very small friendly party," urged Stanley.

"Quite as large as the party yesterday, I dare say," rejoined Lady Starkey.

"No, there are one or two omissions that would certainly be made," said Stanley.

"If those omissions are made, Miss Warburton won't escape," said Rose.

"Oh! yes, she will," replied Stanley. "Yesterday Captain Darcy was a great favourite, but he has very likely got his *cong  * to-day."

"Is it possible she can be so inconstant?" cried Rose.

"Such is her character," replied Stanley.

The young lady glanced at her aunt, but read no contradiction in her looks.

"She enjoys, and not undeservedly, the reputation of being a great coquette," said Mrs. Brereton.

"I am very sorry to hear it," observed Rose. "Sir John

Lambert told me she was dreadfully fickle, but I thought he must exaggerate."

"He did not exaggerate in the slightest degree," said Mrs. Brereton. "She is always changing her admirers."

"Dear me, how shocking!" exclaimed Rose.

While they were thus talking, Sir John Lambert came in, and almost immediately burst into a laugh.

"May we hear what amuses you, Sir John?" asked Lady Starkey.

"Undoubtedly," he replied, still laughing. "I have just met Darcy, and what do you think? You saw what a great favourite he appeared to be yesterday with Mildred Warburton. Well, he persuaded himself, as several others have done, that he had only to propose to be accepted. Accordingly, this morning he called at the Grosvenor Hotel with that intention. Suspecting his design, the young lady immediately quitted the room, and left him to Lady Talmash, by whom his hopes were quietly and effectively extinguished. Miss Warburton, he was informed, had never given him a serious thought—never meant to accept him. He remonstrated, and was allowed a hearing; but he gained nothing by the motion. His dismissal was confirmed. This relation must be correct, since I had it from the luckless victim himself, whom I met just now in Pall Mall as I came here."

Apparently, Sir John had very little commiseration for his friend, for on the close of his recital, he again laughed loudly, and was joined in his merriment by Stanley.

Both Lady Starkey and Mrs. Brereton seemed amused by Darcy's failure, but Rose was shocked by the treatment he had experienced.

"After the marked encouragement given to Captain Darcy yesterday," she said, "I think Miss Warburton's conduct most unfeeling."

"It serves him quite right," cried Stanley, laughing. "I can't pity him in the least. I expected he would make a fool of himself, but I didn't think he would be in such a hurry to do it."

"He has made a fool of himself in more ways than one in this affair," said Sir John. "He ought to have taken the hint given him."

"Anybody else would have done," said Stanley.

"Men won't always take a hint, however plain it may be," said Lady Starkey.

"Darcy is the last man I should have thought would act so foolishly," remarked Sir John. "But if I understand him aright he won't give up the chase."

"I shouldn't be surprised at anything he does," observed Lady Starkey.

As the words were uttered, the unlucky hero of the story just recounted, came in.

He saw at once that all was known, and was vexed at his imprudence in confiding the matter to Sir John.

But his coolness did not desert him. Marching up to Lady Starkey, he said in a voice that all might hear:

"I bring some droll news. Would you believe it? A young lady who smiled upon me very graciously yesterday, has just rejected me! Yes, absolutely rejected me! However, I don't despair. There may yet be a turn in my favour. If not, I shan't break my heart."

Though Stanley enjoyed Darcy's mortification, he could not help admiring his singular audacity. The two young men saluted each other coldly, and the looks they exchanged were by no means friendly.

For a few moments Lady Starkey did not recover from her surprise at Darcy's unexpected appearance, and when she addressed him she thought it best not to make any further allusion to his rejection by Mildred, but to let the matter drop.

Altogether the impression produced by the unsuccessful suitor was unfavourable, and everybody thought the young lady had acted judiciously in getting rid of him.

So unsatisfactory indeed was his reception, that he did not stay more than five minutes, and when he was gone they all gave vent to the laughter which they had hitherto restrained.

Let no unsuccessful suitor expect sympathy from his friends.

## XXVI.

## THE RIDE IN ROTTEN ROW.

Not long after Darcy's departure, the squire, with his bewitching daughter and Lady Talmash, made their appearance.

Lady Starkey did not give them the slightest hint that the rejected suitor had just left, or that she knew anything about what had recently occurred, and all the rest of the party were equally cautious ; but when they regarded the lovely girl, with triumph written in her countenance, they did not wonder at Darcy's deep disappointment and mortification.

The fascinating coquette, as some of them termed her, was in high spirits, and seemed anxious to have a little talk with Stanley, but he kept out of her influence as long as he could.

When the squire was able to manage it, he took Sir John Lambert aside, hinting that he had something to tell him ; and though they conversed in a low tone, the subject of the discourse was easily surmised.

Presently Lady Starkey interrupted them by inquiring from Mr. Warburton whether he intended to prolong his stay in town.

"I can scarcely tell," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "I meant to leave to-day, but here I am. And were I to fix my departure for to-morrow something would be sure to detain me. I wish I had made an arrangement to stop a month."

"There is no reason, papa, why you should be in a hurry to go back," said Mildred. "I'm sure our time has passed most agreeably."

"I should think so," observed Lady Starkey, smiling.

"But I like the country better than town," said the squire.

"You won't complain of want of amusement, sir," remarked Lady Talmash. "Our time has been fully occupied. And to-day we have the park, where Mildred is sure to make a sensation with her new steed."

"No doubt of it," said Stanley.

"I have a great favour to ask of you, Stanley," said

Mildred, coming up to him. "Pray accompany me during my ride. I'm sure you will."

She looked at him so entreatingly that he could not refuse.

"What I feared has occurred," whispered Lady Starkey to Sir John Lambert.

"Don't be alarmed," he replied in the same low tone.

"He won't be entangled again."

"I'm not sure of that," said her ladyship.

Rose, who heard what passed, was not without uneasiness.

"Now you must all come and dine with me to-day at the Norwood Hotel," said the squire. "Those who like it, can spend a couple of hours or so previously at the Crystal Palace. What says your ladyship? Does the plan suit you? You dine very well I am told at the Norwood Hotel. Sir John, I'm quite sure, will take charge of you and your ladies, and bring you by rail to the Crystal Palace."

Lady Starkey would have declined, but Sir John whispered her to accept.

Feeling sure he had some motive for the suggestion, she complied, though rather reluctantly.

All was speedily arranged. Sir John promised to escort Lady Starkey and her friends by rail to the Crystal Palace, and order dinner, at the hour appointed, at the adjacent hotel.

The squire and his ladies did not stay much longer, and Stanley went with them.

"Now do tell me, dear Sir John," said Lady Starkey, aside to him, "why you advised me to accept Mr. Warburton's invitation to dinner. I really want to be quiet to-day, and so does Mrs. Brereton."

"Don't you see?" he replied in a whisper. "I want you to look after Stanley."

Her ladyship quite understood him.

Having arranged that they should start from the Victoria Station at three o'clock, Sir John likewise went his way.

When our peerless equestrienne, on her superb horse, rode into Rotten Row with Stanley beside her, attended by her father and Lady Talmash, and followed by a couple of grooms, she produced quite a sensation.

Everybody wondered who she was, but no immediate information could be obtained. Numbers of young men drew up to see the new beauty pass by, and their expressions of admiration were loud enough to reach her ears.

Stanley heard all these praises, and though he fancied he had become indifferent to the lovely girl's charms, he soon found out his mistake.

By a variety of little arts, Mildred did her best to revive his passion, and it soon became evident that she had succeeded.

Before he had been an hour by her side he was as much in love with her as ever. Her wondrous fascination of manner, now exerted to the utmost, proved irresistible.

Lady Talmash was not blind to her lovely friend's success, and was greatly delighted by it. As a well-wisher to Stanley, she had been much put out by the manner in which he was thrown over for Darcy. Now that he had regained his ground, she hoped he would be able to hold it, and resolved to give him all the aid she could.

Never doubting her powers of fascination, Mildred was not surprised by her success. But she scarcely expected it would be so speedy, and so complete.

No doubt the squire heard the praises lavished upon his lovely daughter, but he seemed quite unconscious of them.

One person, however, witnessed the fair girl's triumph with very bitter feelings.

This was Darcy.

Never before had he endured the pangs of jealousy so severely. Never had he felt so enraged by a rival's success. He vowed revenge.

But he could not at the moment exactly see how revenge was to be obtained.

He must wait, and take advantage of the first opportunity that offered. But his resolution was fixed.

The little party had quitted the park, and were on their way to Norwood. They had ridden quickly as far as Dulwich, but proceeded at a more leisurely pace after quitting that pretty village.

The enchantress and her captive were somewhat in advance, so that it was quite possible for them to hold a little private conversation without being overheard by the others.

"Now do tell me, dear boy," said the fair creature, with a most bewitching look; "what has been the matter with you? Ever since I came to town you have been quite changed."

"I might ask the same of you, dearest girl," he rejoined; "and with much better reason. I really thought you had

ceased to care for me, and had transferred your affections to another."

"Nonsense, dear boy!" she said, laughing. "How could you be so foolish? I own I have flirted a little with that vain and impertinent fellow, Darcy—just to amuse myself—nothing more. But when I found out, as I did yesterday, that he took the matter *au sérieux*, I gave him an immediate and positive dismissal. Be sure he won't trouble my poor dear jealous pet again."

"But some one else may," rejoined Stanley; "if you flirt with him in the same manner. Dearest Mildred," he added, with an ardent look, "I love you to distraction, and a smile of encouragement from you, bestowed on any other, makes me frightfully jealous. Tell me! Can you devote yourself to me?"

She looked at him tenderly before she replied.

"Yes, I think I can. I like you better than any one else."

"Oh! If I felt quite sure of that!" he cried, passionately.

"Well, you may feel quite sure," she replied, with more earnestness than she had hitherto used. "Still, you must control your feelings of jealousy, or you may cause another rupture."

"I don't know how I can manage that," he cried. "Cannot matters be settled between us? May I talk to Lady Talmash? May I speak to the squire?"

"I have no objection whatever to your talking to Lady Talmash, who likes you very much, and will give you advice; but don't make a formal offer to papa just yet."

"Why delay, if you love me, as you admit?"

"You will be angry if I tell you the real reason," she said, hesitating.

"No, I won't," he cried.

"Unless you can conquer your feelings of jealousy, I daren't accept you," she replied, seriously. "I should always be afraid of a quarrel."

"I have conquered those feelings—completely conquered them," he cried.

"Since when?" she asked incredulously.

"Since our present explanation," he replied. "You shall have no cause to complain of me in the future."

"Convince me of this, and I am yours as soon as you please."

"How am I to convince you?" he rejoined.

"Consult Lady Talmash," she rejoined, laughing.

At the same time she signed with her whip to the others, and they cantered on till the Crystal Palace rose before them in all its splendour.

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## XXVII.

### A LOVER LOST AND A LOST LOVER REGAINED.

ON arriving at the Norwood Hotel, they found dinner had been ordered for seven o'clock in a private room by Sir John Lambert.

As it was then scarcely half-past six, there was time to join their friends for a few minutes in the Crystal Palace, but Mildred and Lady Talmash declined to go there, as they were in riding costume.

However, the squire and Stanley set off at once, and soon discovered the party near the central transept.

They were in high spirits, and did not complain of fatigue, though they had seen all that was to be seen—had visited the Pompeian Court, the Egyptian Court, the Greek Court, the Alhambra Court, with the Court of Lions, and many other courts, too numerous to mention—and had just returned from the delightful gardens, where the fountains had displayed their wonders.

Mrs. Brereton and Rose were in ecstasies. The beauties of the Crystal Palace, which were new to them both, far exceeded their expectations.

As on the visit to Greenwich, Mrs. Brereton was attended by old Minshull, who was wonder-struck by all he beheld.

The smiles with which Rose welcomed Stanley caused that inconstant young gentleman much compunction. He reproached himself for his fickleness, and longed to tell her what had happened. But of course he couldn't do so just then. However, he felt he was acting a very unworthy part,

and didn't in the least deserve the kind things Rose said to him.

We shall not attempt to defend his conduct, but are bound to state the truth. Poor Rose did not perceive any change, but then she had a great deal to tell, and had almost all the talk to herself.

But both Sir John Lambert and Lady Starkey, who watched him narrowly, formed a much more accurate opinion of the state of things. Stanley felt their eyes were upon him, as well as those of his mother, and was careful, therefore, as to what he said and did.

"How did your daughter enjoy her ride in Rotten Row?" inquired Lady Starkey—not without a certain intention—of the squire.

"Very much, I fancy," he replied, guessing her motive. "But your ladyship must ask Stanley. He was with her all the time. I was behind with Lady Talmash."

"She could not fail to enjoy it," interposed Stanley, "for she was wonderfully admired. I never saw anything like it."

"You'll turn her head if you're not careful, sir," observed Mrs. Brereton to the squire.

"It is not so easily turned as you imagine, ma'am," he rejoined. "I dare say she paid as little attention as I did myself to those young puppies in Rotten Row."

"So much the better," said Mrs. Brereton. "But I have no doubt their impertinent remarks reached her ears."

"I can't tell," replied the squire gruffly.

"Their remarks were complimentary—highly complimentary—not impertinent," said Stanley. "They all agreed she is the prettiest girl and the best horsewoman they had seen for an age."

"If they told her that, I should call it impertinent," said Rose.

"But you must make some allowances for excitement," rejoined Stanley. "It was mere homage paid to her beauty and perfect horsemanship."

"It's time to go to dinner," interposed Sir John, looking at his watch, and offering an arm to Mrs. Brereton.

The squire took charge of her ladyship, and naturally Rose fell to the care of Stanley.

"Did Mildred really look as lovely as you have described her?" she asked, as they walked on.

"You will see her presently, and can then judge for yourself," he rejoined.

Before he set off, the squire slipped half a crown into old Minshull's hand, and told him he might stop an hour longer in the palace, but must then come on to the hotel. The old man looked highly pleased.

The meeting of the ladies at the Norwood Hotel was very friendly and cheerful, and Lady Starkey congratulated Mildred on the extraordinary effect she had produced in Rotten Row.

The party had a very nice room, and the dinner, which was served at once, was excellent.

Stanley sat between Mildred and Rose; but he certainly paid far more attention to the former than the latter.

His manner was so devoted that poor Rose became dreadfully jealous, and Lady Starkey felt that her worst fears were justified.

Sir John, likewise, began to think that the game was up. He didn't see what could be done, for the squire appeared perfectly indifferent, and was constantly jesting, and laughing heartily at his own jokes. As to wine, there was no stint of well-iced champagne, but very little else was drunk.

Not more than an hour was allowed for dinner, and then the horses were brought round, and Sir John took the ladies under his charge to the station.

Nothing was fixed for the morrow, as Lady Starkey declared she could not answer for herself, or for Mrs. Brereton.

Poor Rose squeezed Stanley's hand as they parted, and gave him a slightly reproachful look.

While the neglected girl was whirling by rail towards Victoria Station, the lover she had lost, and the rival who had won him back, were enjoying a most delightful ride to town.

The evening was charming, and seemed expressly made for them—soft and warm, with just light enough to enable them to distinguish each other's faces.

Close together they rode—O! very close; while Lady Talmash and the squire were in front.

The fair coquette had laid aside her coquetry, and treated her lover more frankly than she had hitherto done—so frankly, indeed, that all his doubts vanished, and he entirely believed he had gained her heart.

They talked of the future, and Stanley asked her real

opinion of Brereton Hall, and whether she thought she could make up her mind to live there, when it was restored.

"I could live there now—if you wished it," she replied.

The lover was surprised, and enchanted. He did not expect such a declaration.

"No, no, I won't put your affection to such a test," he said. "Still, as a complete restoration of the old place will take up some time, we may fit up a few rooms immediately—if you approve of the plan, and take a house in town, or elsewhere."

"Delightful," she exclaimed. "Just the thing I should like!"

Assisted by talk like this, need we say that their ride was pleasant, or that they were sorry when it was over?

The squire and Lady Talmash did not interfere with their discourse, or even look round; and as to the grooms, they did not trouble themselves about the lovers.

As they were approaching the Grosvenor, the enamoured youth told the object of his regard that it was the most delightful ride he had ever had in his life.

"May I call in the morning?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied. "I shall expect you about eleven. Don't call on Lady Starkey until you have seen me."

"Have no fear of that," he replied.

As he assisted her to dismount, and she sprang lightly into his arms, he longed most ardently to press her to his heart.

He led her to the door of the hotel, and then took leave of Lady Talmash and the squire, promising to see them on the morrow.

"Has he made an offer?" asked Lady Talmash, as she and Mildred went upstairs.

"He has," replied the other; "but he is coming to-morrow morning to repeat it."

"And receive your answer," said her ladyship. "Well, we must be prepared for him. I don't think there will be any difficulty with papa."

"I think not," replied Mildred, laughing.

## MILDRED.



## I.

## STANLEY REPEATS HIS OFFER.

THAT night, Stanley scarcely slept at all, and when he did sink into slumber, his dreams were of Mildred.

Once more she had completely fascinated him, and he felt that his future happiness entirely rested with her.

Everything now seemed secure. But not till they were bound together by holy ties, should he be without anxiety.

Did no thought of Rose intrude itself? It did—but he dismissed it as quickly as possible, and endeavoured to persuade himself that she would soon forget him. At all events, he would not allow himself to dwell upon her image, but in spite of his determination it appeared before him, and seemed to warn him that he was advancing on a course that would end in unhappiness.

These thoughts occurred to him as he walked through the Green Park towards the Grosvenor, and he more than once stood still to reflect. But he blamed himself for his indecision, and murmured, “I have made a choice, and must adhere to it, come what may! But I believe it is for the best.”

He could not, however, divest himself of a certain feeling of uneasiness, as he entered the Grosvenor, and was shown into a large and handsome room, where he found Lady Talmash and Mildred seated beside a small table.

The captivating smile with which the latter received him dissipated his fears, and he was once more bound hand and foot by the fair enslaver, whose charms were enhanced by an exceedingly pretty morning costume.

Lady Talmash seemed in a very lively mood, and was likewise most becomingly attired.

In reply to his inquiries Stanley was told that the squire had just gone out, but would return presently.

After a little pleasant chat about the occurrences of the day before, Lady Talmash rose and said, with a smile :

"I'll now leave you for a short time. I dare say you have something to say to each other."

Smiling upon them both in the sweetest manner possible, she then quitted the room—kissing her hand as she passed through the door.

The moment she had disappeared Stanley flung himself at Mildred's feet, and, taking her hand—which she did not attempt to withdraw—pressed it to his lips.

Fixing a passionate look upon her, he once more declared his love, and besought her to make him happy.

"Rise, dearest boy," she cried. "Someone may come into the room, and then you will look ridiculous."

"No, I will not quit this posture," he rejoined still more passionately, "till you grant my prayer."

"But I *have* accepted you" she rejoined, smiling. "How often do you require the assurance?"

"Once more only," he replied, still retaining her hand—still gazing up at her lovely countenance. "Let me hear those tender words pronounced. Say you love me !—say you will wed me !"

"You are very exacting," she replied, with a gratified smile. "But I will grant your request. Hear me, then, dear boy, I do love you, and will marry you, provided papa will give his consent."

"He will—he does," cried a loud cheery voice, which could proceed from no one else but the squire.

Stanley instantly sprang to his feet, and looking round saw that the worthy personage had entered the room at this critical moment.

"This is too bad, papa," cried Mildred, rising.

But she did not look displeased nor even surprised by the interruption, and Stanley, taking her hand, led her towards her father, who had stopped.

When within a short distance of the squire, he bowed to him respectfully and said :

"Mr. Warburton, I am about to solicit the greatest boon

you can bestow upon me—your daughter's hand. I love her deeply as you are aware, and will endeavour to make her happy!"

"I have no doubt you will make her a good husband," replied the squire. "Take her, and may every blessing attend you both! May your union be happy!"

After tenderly embracing his daughter, and brushing the tears from his eyes, he shook hands cordially with Stanley.

The party was now joined by Lady Talmash, who felt that the moment for her appearance on the scene had arrived.

Flying towards Mildred she embraced her most affectionately.

"I sincerely congratulate you both," she cried. "You are formed for each other, and your union is sure to be happy." My wishes are now realised, dear Mr. Warburton," she added, shaking hands with him.

"I think I had better retire," said the squire, almost overcome by emotion.

"No, no, dear papa," cried Mildred. "We cannot part with you just now. Sit down on the sofa—pray sit down."

"And I'll sit down beside you, sir, if you'll allow me," said Lady Talmash.

"And we'll sit opposite," added Stanley, bringing chairs for Mildred and himself.

In a very short time the squire quite recovered, and looking from one to the other with still glistening eyes, and speaking in rather tremulous tones, said:

"I thought I was prepared for this moment, but I find I'm not. I have a good deal to say, but I can't say it now."

"Don't be uneasy, dearest papa," said Mildred, taking his hand, and pressing it to her lips, "you are not going to lose me. I shall always be near you—always ready to come to you."

"It is my sincere wish, sir," said Stanley, very earnestly, "that when Mildred becomes my wife, she should be as much your daughter as ever."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the squire with a choking utterance. "Quite impossible! I don't expect it—don't even desire it. But let this be clearly understood—my house will always be your house—and your wife will be as much mistress of it as ever. Come when you will, and stay as long as you please. Your rooms will always be ready for you. My horses

and carriages, and all belonging to them, will be at your disposal."

"Oh! you are too good, dearest papa," exclaimed Mildred.

"Not a bit, my dear child—not a bit!" he said, tenderly pressing her hand. "I have only lived for you, and all I desire is to see you happy."

"Do you wish me to keep up Brereton, sir," asked Stanley.

"Certainly," replied the squire. "You must have a house, and can't have a better. Besides, you *must* keep it up for your mother."

"Exactly my feeling, sir," replied Stanley; "but I desired to ascertain your wishes."

"Moreover, Brereton has the great recommendation of being near you, dearest papa," said Mildred.

"An easy ride, at any rate," said the squire, smiling.

"I have not yet had an opportunity of saying anything," interposed Lady Talmash; "but I have listened with the greatest pleasure to all that has been said. I think Mr. Warburton's proposition the kindest and best that could be made, and one that cannot fail to be conducive to the happiness of his daughter and her husband."

"I'm quite sure of it," exclaimed Stanley.

"So am I," exclaimed Mildred, again kissing her father's hand.

"But your ladyship must be included in the arrangement, or it will not be complete" said the squire. "We all owe much to you who have most materially assisted in bringing about this match. Therefore, if you take any interest in the work of your own hands, you must come frequently and see how it prospers."

"Promise that?" cried Mildred.

"You will ever be welcome," added Stanley.

"I don't doubt it," said Lady Talmash, "therefore I *will* come, and make a long stay."

"The longer the better," said the squire. "Now Stanley," he added, "I should recommend you to make all necessary communications to your mother, without delay."

"It is my intention to do so, sir," he replied.

"I don't feel quite certain that what you have to tell her will be altogether agreeable," said Mildred, "as I am by no means certain that I am such a favourite as I used to be. But never mind. The truth must be told."

"The truth will enchant her," said Stanley. "Don't think otherwise."

"And Lady Starkey and her niece must be duly informed," added Mildred.

"They shall," said Stanley.

"You will see Sir John Lambert at dinner," said the squire. "I have just asked him.

"I am glad of it," replied Stanley, taking leave.

Mildred went with him to the door, where we fancy a tender salute was given and received, but the squire and Lady Talmash saw nothing.

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## II.

### WHAT PASSED BETWEEN STANLEY AND HIS MOTHER.

STANLEY shrank from the disagreeable duty he had to perform, but it could not be avoided.

He felt he should be blamed both by his mother and Lady Starkey for the step he had taken, but this was nothing in comparison with the pain which his conduct might possibly inflict upon Rose. He had proceeded too far to retire thus suddenly, and knew not what excuse to offer.

On arriving at the house in Berkeley-square, he learnt from old Minshull, who opened the door, that his mother was within, but that Lady Starkey and her niece had driven out in the brougham.

"I rather fancy they have received some bad news this morning from Sir John Lambert," said Minshull, "for they have been in low spirits ever since he was here."

Stanley took no notice of the remark, but desired to be shown to his mother. He found her in the boudoir, and thought she did not receive him with her usual affectionate warmth.

"Has anything happened?" he inquired. "Minshull has just told me that Lady Starkey and Rose looked much depressed, and you don't seem in particularly good spirits."

"I'll tell you why, Stanley," she repeated very gravely "You yourself are the cause of our trouble. We have just seen Sir John Lambert, who says you are about to propose to Mildred Warburton. Have you done so?"

"I have proposed, mother, and have been accepted," he replied. "I have come to give you the news."

"I am sorry to hear it," she replied, with something like a groan. "You have made a great mistake."

"How so, mother?" he cried. "I ought to esteem myself singularly fortunate—and most persons will think me so. There are hundreds of young men who would contend with me for Mildred's hand. Bear in mind she is a great heiress, and a great beauty."

"And likewise a great flirt," replied Mrs. Brereton, sharply. "She will make you wretched. How has she behaved to you of late, eh?"

"Never mind! She has satisfactorily explained her conduct."

"Impossible!" cried Mrs. Brereton. "You have succumbed to her fascinations—that is the long and short of it."

"No more of this, mother, if you love me. I tell you Mildred has accepted me."

"And I repeat I am very sorry for it. You might have had a very charming girl, who really loves you, and would have made you happy, and your choice would have pleased both myself and Lady Starkey; but you have given her up for this coquette who has made you her dupe, and is laughing at you in her sleeve."

"Mother, I cannot allow even *you* to speak of Mildred in such terms," cried Stanley, angrily.

But she heeded him not.

"No wonder I am hurt and disappointed," she continued. "You have thrown away a life of real conjugal happiness, for one of constant, jealous torture."

"Mother! *pray*, dear mother!" he cried, vainly trying to stop her.

"You have acted like a fool, I tell you. Ere long you will deeply repent what you have done, and then you will call to mind my words."

"Since you persist in this violent language, mother, I must take my leave," he said. "On calm reflection you will see

you have gone a great deal too far. Tell Lady Starkey and Rose that I have been here, and deeply regret not to have seen them."

"You will not be disappointed," said his mother, as the door opened, and the two persons he had mentioned came in.

Now there was no escape, and he must bear the worst.

Lady Starkey appeared almost as much displeased with him as did his mother; but though Rose looked sad she did not seem resentful.

Stanley was greatly touched by her evident affection.

"So you have committed yourself, I suppose?" cried Lady Starkey. "The coquette has gained her point."

"If your ladyship means that Miss Warburton has accepted me, it is perfectly true," replied Stanley.

On hearing this distinct avowal, Lady Starkey regarded him with scorn, while Rose gave him a look that cut him to the heart.

His anguish was perceptible to all, and caused a slight reaction in his favour.

"Leave us for a few moments, dearest aunt," whispered Rose to Lady Starkey, "and take Mrs. Brereton with you."

Her ladyship complied without a word of remonstrance.

"Stanley," said Rose, as soon as they were alone, "dear Stanley, for I will call you so, as this will be our last interview, I will not reproach you for the cruel deceit you have practised upon me.

"It was no deceit—I swear it," he cried passionately.

"Add not perjury to wrong," she said, "or you will make me hate you. You have given me greater pain by your thoughtlessness—for I will use no harsher term—than I ever yet endured. But I forgive you, and it was to tell you so that I have detained you."

"Thank you for that word," he cried, in a voice half suffocated by emotion. "Oh! thank you!"

"May you be happy!" she murmured, regarding him with tender anxiety. "I do not think you will—but you shall have my prayers."

As she uttered the last words her strength completely failed her, and she would have fallen had not Stanley caught her in his arms.

Greatly alarmed, he bore her to a couch—but before he could place her upon it she had become insensible.

He was rushing out of the room to summon assistance, when Lady Starkey and his mother entered, and instantly perceiving what had occurred, the former flew towards the sofa, while Mrs. Brereton hurried off for some restoratives.

Stanley did not quit the room, but as he regarded the fainting girl, he bitterly reproached himself, and his resolution was almost shaken.

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### III.

#### MILDRED'S MARRIED LIFE.

MORE than a year has passed, and a great deal has occurred during the interval.

The first and most important event we have to record is Stanley's marriage with the lovely Mildred Warburton, which took place as soon as all necessary legal and other arrangements could be made, at Chester Cathedral, in compliance with the squire's wishes, he having always declared that he should like his daughter to be married in the same reverend pile as her mother and grandmother had been.

The wedding was almost private. Neither Mrs. Brereton nor Lady Starkey were present at the ceremony; the former, who had not quitted town, pleading illness, in excuse for non-attendance, and the latter coldly declining the invitation sent her.

The absence of two persons so dear to him, was a great trouble to Stanley, but did not appear to give his bride, or her father, much concern.

The honeymoon was spent by the happy pair on the Continent, chiefly in Switzerland. They were accompanied by Lady Talmash, who proved an invaluable friend; since, by her judicious care and management, she prevented any disagreement from occurring between them.

Of course, it was quite impossible to prevent the lovely young bride from being pleased by the expressions of admiration with which her appearance was everywhere greeted, but

Lady Talmash contrived to keep all objectionable persons at a distance.

Relying on her ladyship's remarkable tact and discretion, Stanley felt quite easy in regard to his beautiful wife, and was amused rather than annoyed at the sensation she excited. He was vain enough to think that in point of good looks he was inferior to none of her numerous admirers—and such, indeed, was the fact.

Meantime, his passionate attachment to her increased, and was fully requited, for she loved him then with an ardour quite equal to his own.

On their return from the wedding trip, they went to Beaulcliffe; the restorations of Brereton Hall not being sufficiently advanced to allow them to take up their abode there with any degree of comfort.

But they really lost nothing by this step, for the worthy squire did everything in his power to make them happy, and quite succeeded in his efforts. It would have been strange indeed, if he had not, for he let them have entirely their own way.

Since she was sixteen, Mildred had been mistress of the house, and her marriage had heightened her influence rather than diminished it.

Lady Talmash was still with them, and likely to remain; her importance to the general comfort being fully recognised and appreciated.

Mrs. Brereton delayed her return till the restorations of the old house should be completed, Lady Starkey having most kindly and considerately extended her invitation to that time.

We must mention that poor Rose had not, as yet, recovered from the shock she had received. She had been seriously ill, but was now slowly improving under the tender care of her aunt.

The squire kept as much company as formerly, but was more careful in the selection of his guests, or rather, he always consulted Mildred and Lady Talmash about them.

Stanley never interfered in the arrangements, and sometimes did not even know who was invited. When he wanted information, he generally applied to Glossop, the butler.

Old Minshall had been sent to Brereton Hall to superintend the workmen, and carefully attended to his master's in-

structions. Stanley's great fear was that after all had been done Mildred would not like the place as well as Beaucliffe.

His apprehensions were shared by Lady Talmash—her ladyship having heard many remarks on the subject from Mildred, who secretly dreaded the anticipated change of abode.

The young mistress of Brereton took little interest in the alterations of the ancient mansion. When she visited the place she spent most of the time in the garden, which had now been completely put in order, and really looked most charming.

However, she did one thing—she ordered new stables to be built on the model of those at Beaucliffe. But she could not be induced to give any directions as to the interior of the house. When Stanley spoke to her on the subject, she always replied laughingly :

“Oh! do just what you please, dearest boy. I'm sure to like it.”

Her husband did not feel quite certain as to that, but hoped she might.

And now we must ask rather a serious question. Had Stanley, since his marriage, ever thought of Rose? We must answer in the affirmative. He reproached himself for his conduct towards her, but endeavoured, though vainly, to banish her image from his mind. His mother, in her letters, never alluded to the forsaken girl; but he learnt from Minshull that she had been dangerously ill. He could only attribute her illness to one cause; and the questions, put by him to the old servant, confirmed the opinion.

“I should say, sir,” observed Minshull, “that Miss Rose has been suffering from disease of the heart. At one time both Lady Starkey and your mother quite despaired of her. Heaven be praised! she's better now.”

Stanley echoed the prayer. Had she died, his breast would have always been torn by remorse.

Fortunately, he was spared this infliction. But he could not forgive himself for the suffering he had caused her; though he recalled, with some satisfaction, her declaration that she forgave him.

At length, the restoration of Brereton Hall was complete. But Mildred showed no anxiety to quit her father's house,

nor did he seem inclined to part with her, but told Stanley they must remain with him a few months longer.

As he could not very well do otherwise, the master of Brereton assented—though rather reluctantly.

Completely renovated and re-furnished—so far as was needful—and with excellent taste, the old hall really looked beautiful. But beautiful as it was, it did not attract Mildred, and it was entirely owing to her persuasions that her father told his son-in-law that he could not part with them.

By this time, Mrs. Brereton, the elder, had returned to her abode, and was delighted with the improvements made in it. Nor did she object to arrangements that left her as much mistress of the mansion as before. She provided herself with an establishment, which, though not large, quite sufficed for her wants, and obviated the necessity of further expense in this particular for the present.

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#### IV.

##### DARCY RECEIVES AN INVITATION TO BEAUCLIFFE.

Now that his mother had returned, Stanley generally spent a portion of each day at Brereton, replenishing the empty shelves of the library with old books, which he had bought—contemplating the family portraits, writing letters, or pacing to and fro in the gallery, and looking into almost every chamber.

Though he made no sort of complaint, his mother did not think he looked happy; and at length, though not without misgiving, ventured to question him on the subject.

They were sitting together in the great banqueting-hall, where no dinner had been given since its restoration, but which really looked magnificent with its old hangings and furniture. They were sitting, we say, near the large bay-window, when Stanley, who had not been very communicative that morning, lapsed into a gloomy silence.

"You don't seem in very good spirits to-day, Stanley," said his mother. "Has anything happened?"

As he took no notice of the question, she repeated it, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Nothing has happened more than usual," he replied.

"I am afraid you are not happy, my dear boy," she said, regarding him anxiously.

"What makes you think so?" he cried, sharply.

"Your looks. Ever since my return I have noticed a change in the once joyous expression of your countenance. I have said nothing to you about it because I feared to displease you. But this morning you look so unhappy that I cannot hold my tongue. If you have any trouble, you may safely confide it to me."

"I have no real trouble, dearest mother," he rejoined. "But I own I am disappointed that my wife won't come and live here. This morning I remonstrated with her on the subject, and she told me, in plain terms, that she dislikes the house. Naturally, I was provoked."

"It certainly is unaccountable that she should have such an aversion to the place," rejoined Mrs. Brereton. "But after all, it doesn't much signify, for you have another house quite as good—if not better. So you must endeavour to reconcile yourself to the deprivation. I was afraid some misunderstanding had taken place between you and your wife; and if such had been the case, I should have been really grieved."

"Then give yourself no uneasiness, dear mother. Mildred and I have not yet had our first quarrel, and mean to avoid it. Lady Talmash keeps all straight between us. As to my excellent father-in-law, he is really the very best fellow on earth, and I believe would do anything to please me, except part with his daughter."

"Why he *has* parted with her—he *has* given her to you, my dear boy," exclaimed Mrs. Brereton, laughing. "What more would you have?"

"I want to have her all to myself. I want her to live here, at Brereton."

"The present arrangement is much the best, if you could only think so. Your wife has such an indulgent father that she cannot leave him. Nor is it necessary or desirable that she should. You, yourself, would be of his opinion if you

could only view the matter calmly. Your wife, I suppose, does not object to your spending part of the day here?"

"On the contrary, she urges me to do so," he replied.

"Very well, then, what more do you want? The good, generous squire takes care you are put to no expense. Few fathers-in-law would behave so liberally."

"I grant it all," rejoined Stanley. "Nevertheless, I should very much prefer to live here with my wife."

"Get rid of that notion as soon as you can," cried his mother, rather impatiently. "You cannot possibly be better off than you now are. Most young men would envy you. Besides, your lovely wife is safer at Beaucliffe than here?"

"How so, mother? Do you mean to insinuate that I couldn't take care of her?"

"No such thing. But the fact that she is with her father ought to relieve you of all anxiety concerning her."

"Her father is not particularly vigilant," cried Stanley.

"More vigilant than you imagine. She is in no danger with him. I advise you to let things remain as they are."

"I won't make any promise, lest I shouldn't be able to keep it."

After a brief silence, he again looked at his mother, and said:

"Why didn't you inform me of poor Rose's illness?"

"Because Lady Starkey desired me not. What need was there to write to you about it? You had ceased to care for her."

"No no. I felt—and still feel—the deepest interest in her; and am rejoiced to learn that she is now out of danger."

"Stanley," said his mother, gravely, "you must think no more of Rose. She has quite conquered her love for you. At one time we thought her heart was broken."

"Her heart broken, mother?"

"Ay, broken. But Lady Starkey succeeded in convincing her that her affections were misplaced, and saved her."

Stanley could not repress a groan.

"Let us dismiss this subject," said his mother. "And I beg you won't mention poor dear Rose's name to me again."

"Fear it not," he replied, in a tone of anguish. "But I must tell you how deeply I have reproached myself for the suffering I have caused her."

"I don't wonder at it," she rejoined. "And now no more."

They were still sitting together, talking of other matters, when the noise of horses' feet was heard in front of the hall.

Stanley jumped up, and, hastening to the window that looked out upon the entrance, beheld his wife, accompanied by her father and Lady Talmash, and attended by a couple of grooms.

Mildred, who never looked better than in her riding-dress, was mounted on her famous hunter, and seemed in excellent spirits. She was talking and laughing joyously.

Surprised that they did not dismount, Stanley went to speak to them. As he passed through the entrance hall he met Minshull, who told him they were not coming in, but wished to see him.

"What the deuce is the matter?" thought Stanley, quickening his steps.

"Stanley, dear boy," cried Mildred, as he made his appearance; "we've only just called to tell you we are riding to Bostock Hall. We don't want you to go with us—unless you like."

"Come along!" cried the squire. "A ride this fine morning will do you good."

"Yes, I strongly recommend it," added Lady Talmash.

"I'll follow," replied Stanley. "I've got something to do here that I want to finish."

"Poh! That's a mere idle excuse," cried his wife. "But do just as you please."

By this time Mrs. Brereton had come out, and begged them to stay, if only for five minutes.

"Can't get off my horse, thank you, ma'am!" cried Mildred.

"Do, my dear, just to oblige me," urged Mrs. Brereton.

"There are several things I want to show you."

"I'll see them another time—not now," replied Mildred.

"Come along, papa."

And kissing the tips of her fingers to Mrs. Brereton, she rode off, attended by the others.

"There goes an affectionate daughter-in-law," observed Stanley to his mother. "I hope you are pleased with her."

"Very much," replied Mrs. Brereton. "I thought she looked quite beautiful, and as you married her for her beauty you ought to be equally well pleased."

"I said I would follow them, but I doubt if I shall," observed Stanley.

"That doesn't look as if you cared for her society," said his mother. "Keep your promise."

Stanley made no reply, but went into the house.

The party, who had just left Brereton Hall, had not ridden more than a couple of miles, when they saw a gentleman on horseback coming towards them.

Even at a distance, Mildred fancied she recognised him, but as he drew nearer, she felt quite sure it was Captain Darcy, and said so to the others.

Darcy, for he it was, knew them as soon as they knew him, and riding forward, took off his hat, and expressed the great pleasure it afforded him to meet them.

"I have been staying for a few days in this neighbourhood, Mr. Warburton," he said, "and was on my way to call on you."

"Sorry I shan't be at home to receive you, captain," said the squire. "But will you come and stay a day or two with me at Beaucliffe?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he added, "Come to dinner, come to-morrow, if it suits you."

"I shall be enchanted to accept the invitation," replied Darcy, "if Mrs. Stanley Brereton approves of it."

"Oh, I should be happy to see you," rejoined Mildred. "Besides, I never interfere with papa's arrangements, nor does my husband, though we are staying with him."

"Then I'll come with the greatest pleasure," replied Darcy.

Fancying Lady Talmash looked rather grave, he now addressed himself to her, but did not succeed in winning a smile.

"Where are you staying, captain?" asked the squire.

"At Bostock," he replied.

"How odd!" exclaimed Mildred. "Why, we are now going there."

"Then since it is needless to call at Beaucliffe in your absence, I will ride back with you," said Darcy.

And as he joined the party, he contrived to place himself near Mildred.

"I see you have got my old horse," he said. "I hope you like him as well as ever?"

"Better than ever," she rejoined, smiling.

"That's sati factory," he cried. "You see, I have ven-

tured into your neighbourhood," he added, lowering his tone "though I was almost afraid to do so. And now to my great surprise and delight I have got an invitation to come and stay with you. I hope I didn't do wrong in accepting it, but I really couldn't resist."

"Make yourself quite easy. Papa will be very glad to see you."

"But what about your husband?"

"I can't exactly answer for him. But I don't think he will mind your coming."

"Well, I will do my best to please him."

"In that case it is not improbable you may succeed."

"While this conversation was passing, Lady Talmash observed to the squire:

"I'm sorry you have invited Captain Darcy. He's the very last man you ought to have asked."

"I didn't think of it at the moment," replied the squire. "Perhaps Stanley mayn't like it."

"I'm sure he won't," said Lady Talmash. "Shall I put the captain off?"

"No, no, Mildred wouldn't be pleased with that. Let us hope all may turn out right."

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## V.

### A COOLNESS BETWEEN STANLEY AND HIS WIFE.

STANLEY did not follow the party to Bostock, and they said nothing to him on their return about the invitation given to Captain Darcy, the squire having specially enjoined silence on the subject.

"Darcy is my guest," he said, "and if a mistake has been made, I alone am responsible."

In truth, he was rather afraid that Stanley would be displeased, though he didn't care to confess it.

Little dreaming what was in store for him, Stanley spent the greater part of the next day at Brereton. His wife had

told him that some one, whom he knew, was coming to dinner, and would probably remain for a few days. But she didn't say who it was. Nor did anybody else. So he went away in complete ignorance.

No presentiment of ill could have troubled him, for his mother remarked that he looked much more cheerful than he had done of late.

"Have you any company at Beauchiffe to-day?" she asked.

"Yes, a small dinner party, the Leghs and the Isherwoods, and another person whose name I don't know, but who is going to stay two or three days at the house. Now, that's a thing I don't like. When I know the people, it's all very well, but I can't bear to meet strangers."

"Mr. Warburton's friends are all nice people," said the mother.

"Not at all," he replied. "There are some I wouldn't meet, if I could help it."

"You have grown so very particular."

"I am particular about my wife—not about myself. I don't like to meet certain persons."

"Pooh! pooh!—don't make yourself uneasy."

"I try not to do so—but I can't conquer the feeling. I believe I must be jealous."

"I really believe you are," replied his mother, laughing. "But since you would marry such a lovely creature, you must pay the penalty of your imprudence. Mildred cannot fail to be admired."

"She likes admiration too much," cried Stanley.

"You were always aware of that, my dear boy. It's too late to complain now."

On his return to Beauchiffe, late in the afternoon, Stanley overtook a gentleman, who had a military air, and was followed by a groom, the latter being provided with saddlebags, and carrying a valise. Evidently, this must be the unknown guest.

What was Stanley's astonishment and annoyance, when he discovered that the supposed stranger was no other than Captain Darcy.

On seeing him, Darcy bowed very courteously, and held out his hand, which Stanley felt bound to take.

"You look as if you didn't expect me, Mr. Brereton," said the captain, smiling. "Perhaps Mr. Warburton may not

have mentioned that he invited me yesterday to dine with him and spend a few days at Beaucliffe."

"He certainly did not," replied Stanley, controlling himself with difficulty.

"Ah! That quite explains your surprise," cried Darcy. "However, such is the fact, and I need scarcely say I had the greatest pleasure in accepting an invitation so agreeable in every way. Though rather late in the day, I hope I may be allowed to congratulate you on your marriage with Miss Warburton. As you are aware, I once aspired to her hand myself, but met with the fate I deserved."

In spite of his dislike of Darcy, there was something in the captain's manner that favourably impressed Stanley. Perceiving this, the other went on in the same strain.

"I trust we may become great friends, Mr. Brereton," he said. "Naturally, I was very much provoked at losing such a great prize as you have won. But reflection soon convinced me that you are the right man, and reconciled me to my fate."

Stanley could not avoid laughing at this apparently frank avowal, and Darcy saw that his point was gained.

"Now that I have given you this explanation, Mr. Brereton," he said, "I trust you will dismiss any feeling you may have against me."

"It is already gone," replied Stanley, beginning to think him a good fellow.

Shortly afterwards, he looked round, and exclaimed:

"Here comes Mr. Warburton, with my wife and Lady Talmash."

"So I see," replied Darcy.

When the parties met, the squire was greatly relieved to find his son-in-law and his guest already on such good terms.

"Why didn't you tell me Captain Darcy was coming?" said Stanley to his wife, in a tone of good-natured reproach.

"I'm to blame!" cried the squire.

"I kept it for you as an agreeable surprise," said Mildred.

"I was certain you would be delighted to see him."

"So I am," replied Stanley, shaking hands with him again, and more heartily than before.

By this unexpected meeting all the squire's misgivings were put to flight, and Mildred was secretly pleased.

But clear-sighted Lady Talmash, whose suspicion had been aroused by Darcy's manner, became more uneasy than ever.

Darcy was really charmed with the house, which far surpassed his expectations, and told Stanley again he was the luckiest man of his acquaintance. Stanley made a suitable reply, but didn't seem quite sensible of his extraordinary good luck.

The party invited to dinner was small, consisting of Mr. Legh, the Rector of Birch, and his wife, with Mr. and Mrs. Isherwood, the lady being very handsome and attractive.

Darcy sat next to the young mistress of the house, but did not devote himself exclusively to her, but talked a good deal to the captivating Mrs. Isherwood, who sat on his other side, and seemed much pleased with him.

In a word, he made himself generally agreeable, and pleased everybody except Lady Talmash, who occupied her usual place on the right of Mr. Warburton. On the squire's left was Mrs. Legh, and next to her sat Stanley.

Darcy, who occasionally cast a look at him, thought him rather dull. He certainly was not very lively, but this might be attributable to his abstinence from wine.

"Would you believe it, Captain Darcy," remarked Mildred; "my husband has become a teetotaller."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Darcy. "You surprise me."

"Quite true, I assure you."

"Hum!" exclaimed Darcy, noticing that Stanley overheard the discourse. "I wish I could say as much. But I confess I am rather fond of a glass of good wine—especially champagne."

"Wine is excellent in moderation," remarked the jovial Rector of Birch, who sat on the other side of Mildred, and was very partial to her father's old port. "Tell your husband I said so."

"I will," she replied, laughing.

"If he wants any proof that good wine is beneficial," added the rector, "he has only to look at his father-in-law, who is the picture of good health."

"I never saw a man in finer condition," said Darcy.

At this moment the butler appeared with champagne.

"I certainly shan't refuse it," said Darcy, laughing.

"Nor I," added the rector.

After dinner a bottle of the famous old port was intro-

duced and finished by Mr. Legh and the squire — Darcy and Mr. Isherwood contenting themselves with a few glasses of exquisite Lafitte—and Stanley drinking nothing.

The conversation turned on the political questions of the day, and was almost entirely conducted by the squire and the rector, both of whom were staunch Conservatives—perhaps we ought to call them good old Tories.

Though he found it somewhat difficult to put in a word, Darcy expressed a decided approval of their opinions, and in consequence rose in his host's estimation.

One of the squire's axioms was that a rubber at whist should always follow a bottle of port.

So he made up one for himself and the rector, while his lovely daughter enchanted the rest of the party by her brilliant performance on the pianoforte. Darcy stood by her side all the time, and Stanley talked quietly, and in a low tone, to Lady Talmash.

On their departure, the visitors declared they had passed a most delightful evening.

"Your dinners are always capital, Mr. Warburton," said the rector, as he shook hands with the squire at parting, "and that old port is magnificent."

As he had good reason, Darcy was extremely well satisfied with his reception. His great aim was not to arouse Stanley's jealousy, and so far he thought he had succeeded. He could not, of course, tell what Lady Talmash was saying to him, but he concluded it was not very favourable to himself. Still he was not much afraid of her, now that he had obtained admittance to the house.

On carefully watching the behaviour of the young pair to each other, the shrewd observer came to the conclusion that a slight quarrel had taken place between them, though whether it arose from jealousy on the husband's part, or from some other cause, he could not determine. The squire did not seem aware of it, but it was clear that Lady Talmash was in the secret.

Next morning, when they all met at breakfast, he felt convinced that his suspicions were correct.

A coolness had occurred between Stanley and his wife, though they took the greatest pains to conceal it from the squire.

What was the cause of the quarrel, Darcy, of course, could

not even conjecture, but he was exceedingly glad that it had occurred before his arrival.

After breakfast, as they all passed out through the open French windows to the lawn, Stanley said to the visitor :

"You must excuse my leaving you, Captain Darcy. Mr. Warburton and the ladies will take every care of you. I generally pass part of the day at Brereton, where I have still some things to arrange. I shall be very glad to show you the house, if you like to ride over."

Before making any direct reply, Darcy consulted Mildred by a look; but the squire answered for her.

"Oh! yes," he said. "We'll bring him over."

"Come to luncheon," said Stanley, addressing Darcy; "though you won't do half so well there as you would here."

"Anything will do for me," replied Darcy.

"I'll send on a basket of provisions," said the squire, "and put a bottle or two of champagne in it," he added, laughing.

As Stanley marched off, Darcy noticed that he did not take leave of his wife, or even look at her.

There was a great deal to be seen, as we know, at Beaulcliffe, and Darcy passed a very agreeable morning in visiting the stables, and looking over the garden in company with the squire and the two ladies. He made himself so amusing that even Lady Talmash was pleased with him; though she did not leave him for a single moment alone with Mildred.

When these inspections were over, they played a game at lawn-tennis on the smooth grass-plot, and then got ready for Brereton.

Mildred drove Lady Talmash in her pretty little phaeton, and the two gentlemen accompanied them on horseback.

When Stanley told his mother that Captain Darcy was coming to luncheon she thought he must be jesting, but when she found he was in earnest, she could not repress her displeasure.

"I couldn't have believed it unless you yourself had told me," she exclaimed. "How could you be so foolish? But you'll repent your folly—that's certain."

"Mr. Warburton wished him to see the house," said Stanley, in a deprecatory tone. "And so did my wife."

"Your wife! I dare say," she cried in increasing astonishment and displeasure.

"Yes, they are all coming. We must prepare for them."

"Give your own orders, then," said his mother. "I will have nothing to do with it."

But with a little persuasion she yielded, and consented to prepare for luncheon.

"But we have nothing in the house," she said; "nothing, I mean, good enough for the squire."

"Oh, he'll see to that himself," said Stanley. "He means to send a basket of good things with some bottles of champagne."

About two o'clock the party arrived at Brereton.

They had halted about a quarter of a mile off to look at the old hall, and Darcy thought it a most picturesque structure.

"Be sure to tell Stanley so, if you want to please him," said Mildred.

"You like it, don't you?" said Darcy to her.

"Not much," she replied. "But then I'm not fond of that kind of house."

"I'm afraid you're rather wanting in taste," said the captain.

On reaching the house they found Stanley at the door ready to receive them, and Darcy again expressed his admiration of the place in most rapturous terms.

"Never beheld anything like it!" he exclaimed. "Never, by Jove!"

"Well, come in and see what it's like inside," said Stanley, giving his arm to Lady Talmash.

Darcy followed with Mildred, and as he stood still in the entrance hall to look at the noble staircase, his raptures increased. The same thing occurred wherever he went.

By this time Mrs. Brereton had regained her usual serenity, and expressed the greatest delight at seeing the squire and the ladies.

But she could not make up her mind to shake hands with Darcy, although he bowed to her very ceremoniously.

Luncheon was served in the great banqueting hall, but no attempt whatever was made at display.

This was the first time Mildred had partaken of a meal in the house, and Mrs. Brereton could not help alluding to the fact.

"Yes, I believe it is," replied the young lady, laughing.

"But not the last," observed the squire. "Ere long she will breakfast, luncheon, and dine here every day."

Stanley looked as if he scarcely expected it.

Assisted by a servant, who had been sent over from Beaucliffe with the basket of good things, old Minshull did wonders, and gave the squire great satisfaction. He was particularly brisk in dispensing the champagne. The luncheon, which was very much enjoyed, occupied more than half an hour.

After a hasty inspection of the interior of the house, which seemed new to Mildred, and elicited the highest praise from Darcy, the party went out.

"Whatever may be his faults," thought Mrs. Brereton, "the captain is a good judge of old houses."

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## VI.

### LADY TALMASH CAUTIONS DARCY.

STANLEY and Lady Talmash lingered in the garden, while the others went to examine the new stables.

"I want to have a little talk with you Stanley," said her ladyship. "We must get rid of that man."

"Darcy?"

"Yes, Darcy. Who else could I mean? He's dangerous—highly dangerous."

"I really don't think so," replied Stanley.

"Then you must be blind," cried her ladyship, in surprise. "I have watched him most carefully, and am certain I have formed a correct opinion of him. If you don't want to lose your wife get rid of him without delay."

"You judge him too severely, I repeat," said Stanley. "It is his habit to assume an air of gallantry."

"Don't be deceived," replied Lady Talmash. "He is enamoured of your wife, and is only waiting an opportunity to breathe his passion into her ears, and to speak truth, she seems inclined to listen to him. You ought to perceive this as plainly as I do."

"If I thought so;" cried Stanley, almost fiercely.

"Keep calm don't make a scene or you'll fail. You ought never to have allowed him to enter the house. But since he has obtained admittance be careful how you get rid of him. He has already won the squire's good opinion."

"Yes, I'm quite aware of that," remarked Stanley. "But supposing your suspicions are correct, which I can scarcely believe, what do you advise me to do?"

"We must consider," replied Lady Talmash; "and it is to talk the matter over that I have brought you here. Unluckily, you cannot speak to your wife, or put her upon her guard. She would deeply resent any interference on your part, and attribute it to a wrong motive. You cannot warn the squire—because he would merely laugh at you."

"What then can I do?" cried Stanley. "Shall I act on my own responsibility?"

"I will tell you what I propose," replied Lady Talmash. "I will speak to Captain Darcy myself, if you desire it. But I wouldn't do this without consulting you."

"You will do me the greatest favour possible," rejoined Stanley.

"I will urge him to go at once, and point out the consequences likely to ensue if he remains here," said her ladyship. "After my representations, I think he will see the necessity of immediate departure."

"I have no doubt of it," said Stanley. "You place me under the deepest obligations to you—and Mildred ought to be equally obliged."

"She must know nothing of my intentions, or she would do her best to thwart them," said her ladyship.

"The sooner you act the better," said Stanley, anxiously.

"I will seize the first opportunity that offers," said Lady Talmash. "Now let us go and look after them."

In a frame of mind which will be easily understood, Stanley conducted her to the stables, where they found the squire giving some directions to a groom, while Darcy and Mildred were conversing together at some distance from him.

"Look there!" said Lady Talmash, pointing them out to her companion.

"You are right," he replied, scarcely able to control himself. "This is intolerable."

"Pray be calm!" she rejoined. "Send him to me. I will stop here."

Stanley instantly obeyed, and hurrying towards the pair who were too much occupied with each other to notice his arrival, said, with as much calmness as he could command:

"Sorry to interrupt you, Captain Darcy, but I come to tell you that Lady Talmash wishes to say a word to you."

"To me!" cried Darcy, startled. "Where is she?"

"Yonder—at the other side of the yard."

"I'll be back in a moment," said Darcy, as he hurried off.

Mildred did not say a word to her husband, but immediately joined her father.

"Your ladyship wishes to speak to me I understand," said Darcy, as he approached her.

"Yes, I have something to say in private," she replied.

"We may be interrupted here."

And she left the yard, accompanied by Darcy, who guessed what was coming.

"As soon as they had gained a retired walk she stopped, and said in a determined tone:

"You must leave Beaucliffe at once, Captain Darcy. I insist upon it. I see through your designs, and am determined to put a stop to them."

"And your ladyship expects me to obey your commands?" he said.

"I do," she replied, in the same determined tone as before, "and I cannot doubt your compliance with them."

"Then you will find yourself mistaken," he replied. "I mean to remain at Beaucliffe as long as Mr. Warburton is good enough to receive me. I disdain to notice your insinuations, except to declare positively that they are unfounded."

"Mr. Warburton will think differently when I speak to him on the subject," said her ladyship; "and I am convinced he won't suffer you to remain in his house another hour. He knows the great affection I have for his daughter, and that I would rather die than allow her happiness to be destroyed."

"I defy you to prove that your suspicions are correct," cried Darcy. "I have said and done nothing that I cannot justify both to Mr. Warburton and his son-in-law. I have the greatest admiration for Mrs. Stanley Brereton, but it is accompanied with the profoundest respect."

"Do not think to impose upon me, sir," rejoined her lady-

ship, with an incredulous smile. "Stanley Brereton shall not be wronged—Mr. Warburton shall not be made wretched—nor Mildred disgraced—if I can prevent it. Go, you shall. If you dare to remain, after the warning I have given you, you will take the consequences."

Darcy began to be alarmed.

"I certainly do not desire to cause any unpleasantness to such a worthy gentleman as Mr. Warburton," he said; "and therefore I will go. But I do not for a moment admit the truth of your ladyship's accusation."

"You have decided rightly," she rejoined, in an approving tone. "Go, and you shall hear no more about it."

"How can I go?" cried Darcy. "What excuse can I offer for my sudden departure?"

"I will find some excuse for you," she replied.

Darcy reflected for a moment, and then said:

"I have it. Luckily, my groom is here. Will your ladyship be good enough to send him to me with both horses. I will then depart immediately, and relieve you of any further anxiety. Say what you please for me to the squire. He will think me mad—but I cannot help it."

"I will go at once," rejoined Lady Talmash, delighted at having accomplished her object so successfully.

And she hastened to the stable-yard, while Darcy proceeded to the drive in front of the house.

Both horses were ready, and the groom standing with them, so she sent him round at once.

As soon as Darcy had mounted, he said to his man:

"Ride back to Beacliffe as fast as you can. Get my things, and follow me to Knutsford."

The groom looked astounded by the order, but prepared to obey it, while his master galloped off.

Great consternation prevailed in the stable-yard.

"What the deuce is the matter?" said the squire to Lady Talmash. "Have you frightened my guest away?"

"Yes, I believe he's gone," replied her ladyship, laughing.

"This is really too bad," cried Mildred, looking very much put out. "You take rather too much upon yourself."

"You won't think so, my dear, when we come to talk the matter over," whispered Lady Talmash.

"But is Captain Darcy really gone?" inquired Mildred in the same low tone.

"I hope so—and believe so," replied her ladyship.

Mildred asked no more, but looked at her father, who seemed quite perplexed.

Stanley did not care to conceal his satisfaction of having got rid of the dangerous intruder, and took the earliest opportunity of thanking Lady Talmash for the great service she had rendered him. He then left the stable-yard, and told his mother what had occurred. She was much pleased by the intelligence.

"This is a great relief to me," she cried. "Truly Lady Talmash is an invaluable friend."

"She is indeed," replied Stanley, earnestly. "I have found her so on many former occasions. But never more than now."

After Darcy's sudden dismissal Mildred did not seem so fond of her friend as before, and told her she had been guilty of unwarrantable interference; but they very soon made up the quarrel, and Lady Talmash convinced her she had acted for the best.

The squire likewise highly approved of her ladyship's conduct, and confessed he had acted very injudiciously in inviting Darcy to the house.

About the same time a reconciliation occurred between Stanley and his wife. Whether this was accomplished by the same kind friend we cannot tell, but she was greatly rejoiced when it took place.

Stanley certainly seemed much happier, but he could not prevail upon his wife to fix any time for her removal to Brereton.

As before, whenever he mentioned the subject to her she laughed it off, and even Lady Talmash advised him not to trouble her.

"She won't go," said her ladyship. "So it is useless to try and persuade her. I really believe she is afraid of a certain old lady, and dreads her interference."

"Very likely," replied Stanley. "But I can't part with that dear old lady, even to please my wife."

"Then let things be," said Lady Talmash.

## VII.

## STANLEY PASSES THE NIGHT IN THE HAUNTED ROOM.

ONE day, when Stanley was at Brereton, old Minshull told him privately, and with a very mysterious look, that he had heard strange sounds in the house on the previous night.

"Indeed! Where did you hear the noises, and at what hour?" inquired Stanley.

"I heard them in the gallery, soon after midnight," replied the old servant. "I went out as soon as I could with a light, and looked about, but could see no one. Half an hour later I heard the same sounds again, and went out once more as quickly as I could, but not a soul was visible."

"The ghost must have come back to us again," remarked Stanley.

Minshull did not seem inclined to laugh.

"I thought the sounds came from the haunted chamber, sir," he said.

"Did you go in?" asked Stanley.

"I couldn't sir," replied the old man. "The door was locked inside."

"Locked inside!" cried Stanley. "Then some one must have been in the room."

"I knocked and called out—but not very loudly, for fear of alarming my mistress. But no one answered. Early in the morning I again tried the door and found it unfastened."

"Strange!" exclaimed Stanley. "I tell you what Minshull," he added, after a little reflection, "I'll sleep in that room to night."

"Better not, sir," cried the old man, "you'll get a shock. I'm quite sure it's the ghost," he added, with an air of profound conviction.

Stanley ordered him not to say a word on the subject to the women servants; nor did he himself inform his mother that he meant to pass the night at Brereton, as he feared to alarm her; but he directed the old servant to prepare the haunted room for him.

"Mark what I say, Minshull," he added. "At eleven o'clock you will find me at the front door. By that time my mother and the women will have retired to rest, and I can go up-stairs without arousing them."

The old man promised that all his orders should be strictly attended to, and the bed ready for him. "I can make that myself," he added.

Stanley was rather more communicative to his wife, and told her of his intention of passing the night in the haunted chamber, laughingly asking if she would accompany him.

"Decidedly not," replied Mildred. "I should die of fright if I saw the ghost."

To prevent any idle talk Stanley walked over from Beaucliffe. The night was very dark with no moon and not a single star to be seen.

On arriving he rapped at the front door, which was immediately opened by Minshull.

Having made all necessary preparations in the dark they slowly mounted the great staircase. The boards did not creak, nor was the slightest sound, likely to betray them, audible; but Stanley fancied that a dark figure preceded them.

He breathed his suspicions to Minshull, but the old man declared he heard nothing—nor could anything whatever be seen in the profound gloom—and Stanley did not like to use a small pistol, which he carried, for fear of alarming his mother and the house.

The gallery was quite as dark as the staircase, but Stanley thought he perceived the same phantom-like figure gliding along, but it almost instantly disappeared.

Minshull had purposely left the door of the haunted chamber unlocked, and found it so on his return. On entering he struck a match and lighted a taper, which revealed the antique bedstead, with its rich and sombre curtains, and the dark old wardrobe and furniture, all looking very grim and ghostly.

Stanley's first business was to take from his pocket the small pistol just alluded to, and place it on a little table near the bed.

"May I ask if that pistol is loaded, sir," asked Minshull, watching the proceeding with uneasiness.

"Loaded with ball," replied Stanley. "Come to me early in the morning."

"I will, sir," replied Minshull. "I hope you may have a good night. The bed's as comfortable as I could make it."

"No doubt—but I shan't use it."

Just as Minshull was going out, he stopped, and added, "Pray don't use that pistol, sir!"

"Make yourself easy, I don't mean to use it, unless compelled."

And the old man departed.

"Why is he so afraid of the pistol?" thought Stanley.

Left alone, Stanley looked carefully round, but saw nothing to lead him to suspect that any one was concealed in the chamber.

Though the bed seemed very tempting, he resolved not to occupy it, but sat down in an arm-chair, which was conveniently placed near the little table, and presently fell asleep.

How long he remained in this state he could not tell, but some slight sound aroused him, and he beheld a female figure standing near the partly-open door.

A momentary view of this figure revealed features of great beauty, but pale as death. The dress was that of some religious order, with the veil thrown back.

He saw no more, for, as he started to his feet, the taper was instantly extinguished; and, judging by the sound, the strange apparition must have passed through the door and closed it.

Stanley quickly followed, but could distinguish nothing in the sombre gallery. Nor could he re-light the taper, for the matches were gone.

We shall not now inquire into the nature of his reflections, but defer their consideration to the morning.

Again sitting down in the arm-chair, he again fell asleep.

At daybreak he awoke, and looking round the chamber, perceived a small piece of folded paper on the floor. He took it up, and, opening it, read these words traced in pencil:

"Do not search for me. You will not find me. I shall appear again at the right time. I have something important to communicate."

This strange missive greatly puzzled him, though he had already come to the conclusion that Minshull knew more of the matter than he chose to confess.

Not long afterwards, the old servant himself rapped at the door, and was instantly admitted.

On his entrance, he looked inquiringly at Stanley, and said: "Well, sir, have you seen the ghost?"

"I have," replied the other, significantly, "and so have you."

"I, sir!" exclaimed Minshull. "I heard it, as I told you, but didn't see it."

"Don't attempt to impose upon me," cried Stanley, angrily. "You know who this supposed apparition is, and for what purpose the crazed being who plays the part has come here. Who is she, I say? What is the meaning of the mystification? Speak plainly if you would obtain forgiveness for the deception you have practised upon me!"

Minshull did not answer for a minute or two.

Then assuming an air of contrition, he said:

"I fear I have done wrong, sir; but I acted for the best."

"What have you done?" asked Stanley, impatiently.

"Who is the lady, I repeat?—and what brings her here?"

"She is Sister Aline."

"Sister Aline! I never heard of her."

"Oh, yes, you have, sir," replied Minshull. "She is the lady who went to Dieppe with your uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey, and was with him when he was killed in a duel by Captain Darcy."

"But that unhappy lady retired into a religious house," said Stanley. "Ah, I see!" he exclaimed, "that accounts for her strange attire. Why has she come here?"

"Excuse me, sir, I am bound to secrecy on that point," replied Minshull. "Nor can I tell you why she has been allowed to come into the house. But I am sure you will approve of her design when you learn it."

"Does my mother know Sister Aline is here?" inquired Stanley.

"No, sir, she does not. I thought it best to keep the matter from her for a time, at least."

"I know not what to think of the strange proceeding," said Stanley. "But I trust no harm will come of it."

"Have no fear, sir," rejoined Minshull. "If I did not feel certain the poor lady means well, I would never have consented to act with her. You seem to fancy she is not in her

right mind, sir—but that is a great mistake. She is as rational as either of us.”

“One more question, and I have done,” remarked Stanley. “Why was that strange story told me about the ghost?”

“Pray, excuse my saying more at present, sir,” replied Minshull. “In due time Sister Aline will give you a full explanation of all that now appears mysterious.”

“Well, my curiosity is still unsatisfied. But, to make an end, tell this poor lady—for whom I have the deepest sympathy—tell her, I say, from me, that she can remain at Brereton, and occupy this room, as long as she thinks proper, and whenever she desires to speak to me I will see her. She need not appear as a ghost.”

“I will do your bidding sir,” replied Minshull. “You now perceive I was right when I recommended you not to use your pistol. Suppose you had shot Sister Aline?”

“I *won't* suppose it,” said Stanley, putting the pistol in his pocket. “And now it is time I should start for Beaucliffe. Go down before me and open the door. You may expect me again in the afternoon.”

As Stanley descended the staircase and crossed the entrance hall, he did not perceive that he was watched from the gallery by Sister Aline.

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## VIII.

### SISTER ALINE'S LETTER.

STANLEY deemed it best to say nothing for the present to his wife, or any one else at Beaucliffe, about the strange occurrences of the previous night.

When Mildred, therefore, questioned him on the subject, he returned an evasive answer, but the expression of his countenance was so singular, that she told him she was sure the ghost must have been laughing at him.

Neither the squire nor Lady Talmash were aware of his

nocturnal visit to Brereton, and he did not enlighten them on the subject.

In the afternoon,—while the ladies took a drive in the phaeton, and the squire accompanied them on horseback,—he returned to the old mansion. His curiosity had been strongly excited, and he hoped something might occur to gratify it.

He found his mother in the garden, and after a little converse with her, entered the house, and proceeded to the library, where Minshull brought him a letter, and having delivered it hurried out of the room.

Eagerly tearing open the envelope, Stanley found a long, closely-written letter, and at once commenced its perusal. It ran thus :

“I said you should hear from me, and I now fulfil my promise.

“As you are already aware who I am, I will only say that I was with Sir Thomas Starkey when he was killed by Darcy in a duel at Dieppe.

“After that tragic event, I hoped Heaven would take me, but my prayers were unheard. Possibly, I may have been spared for some purpose.

“I then entered a religious house, and trust that my sighs and tears, my constant prayers, and the severe acts of penance I perform, may serve to blot out my guilt.

“Pardon rests with a merciful and gracious Heaven! But the heavy load that weighed upon my breast, and well-nigh crushed me, is somewhat lightened, and hope begins to dawn upon me.

“I should never have quitted, even for a short time, the asylum wherein I have taken refuge, had I not learnt that the perfidious Darcy, who had done me so much injury, had vowed to rob you of your lovely wife, and was endeavouring to carry out his wicked design.

“The pain given me by these tidings was indescribable. I besought Heaven to shield her from the destroyer, but still dreadful fears beset me, and unable to shake them off, I consulted the Lady Superior, who was filled with compassion for me. After some consideration, she allowed me to quit the Retreat for a time, and proceed to England.

“Having heard much about this old mansion from the ill-fated Sir Thomas, I resolved to come here, and I carried out

my scheme. Your old servant, Minshull, and an elderly female assisted me. From inquiries I have caused to be made, I find that Darcy is still in the neighbourhood, and, doubtless, still hopes for success in his wicked project.

"Should you desire to converse with me, come to the haunted chamber. "ALINE."

Just then, as if especially summoned, Minshull entered the library.

"Is the lady in the haunted chamber?" demanded Stanley.

Minshull replied in the affirmative.

"Say I will come to her immediately."

The old servant at once obeyed the injunction, and when Stanley reached the gallery he was stationed near the mysterious chamber, and opened the door for him, closing it as soon as he had entered.

Sister Aline now stood before him in her dark religious dress, looking pale as death.

For a few moments they remained gazing at each other in silence, Stanley being greatly struck by the expression of the recluse's countenance.

At length she spoke.

"Strange as my conduct may seem, I have sought to serve you. I cannot deny that a desire for vengeance has likewise influenced me, but my chief aim has been to preserve your wife. This man is more dangerous than you imagine, and will not easily abandon his purpose."

"It would seem so," replied Stanley. "I thought he was gone. But it is evident he will not depart unless driven hence, and I must now undertake the task."

"No, leave it to me," rejoined Sister Aline. "I can easily get rid of him. But I shall not see him until to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be soon enough," said Stanley. "But I trust you will remain here."

"Such is my intention," she replied.

"Will you see my mother?"

"Not till my work is done. Not even then unless she consents to see me."

"Since you have decided to remain here," said Stanley, "I will give Minshull some further orders respecting you."

"None are needed. He and his old female assistant serve me perfectly."

"I am much pleased to hear it," replied Stanley. "To-

morrow I shall be here again, and if you wish to see me, send word by Minshull."

Before departing, he took her hand, and raised it respectfully to his lips.

On reaching the entrance hall, he met his mother returning from the garden, and remarked that she had a letter in her hand that looked like a telegraph message.

"Have you received some news?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied. "We are going to have some visitors. Who do you think are coming to stay at the hall?"

"I can't possibly guess," he rejoined.

"Lady Starkey and her niece, Rose," replied his mother.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "I am very glad to hear it. But I didn't think Rose was strong enough to travel."

"Oh! yes; she is much better than she was—and I trust quite out of danger. About a week ago, I wrote to Lady Starkey, asking her and Rose to come and spend a month with me, and she has just sent a telegram to inform me they will be here this afternoon."

"Rather sudden," cried Stanley—somewhat startled—for he thought of Sister Aline. "I'm afraid you will scarcely be prepared for them."

"Don't alarm yourself, my dear boy," she rejoined, smiling. "They won't take me by surprise. I've got all quietly ready, for I felt certain they would come—and you see I was quite right."

"Well! Where do you mean to put them?" asked Stanley, rather curiously.

"For Lady Starkey I have chosen the large room in the gallery," replied Mrs. Brereton, "as I think it will exactly suit her. To Rose I have assigned the adjoining chamber, which you know is much smaller. They are sure to bring a lady's-maid with them, so she can sleep in the dressing-room."

"A very good arrangement," observed Stanley, approvingly. "The large room is so beautifully furnished that Lady Starkey must be charmed with it. And all the rest will do very well."

"I'm glad you're pleased," replied his mother. "I hope you will stay to welcome them. They'll be here in less than an hour."

"Then I'll certainly stay," he replied.

His mother now left the room to give some orders regarding her visitors, and Stanley could not help thinking what a strange coincidence it would be if Sister Aline and Lady Starkey should be lodged in the house at the same time. Still, he felt that neither ought to know it.

It likewise occurred to him that he ought to prepare Minshull for the new-comers, and an opportunity of doing so was quickly afforded by the entrance of the old servant.

"Harkee, Minshull," he cried. "Are you aware that Lady Starkey and her niece are coming here to-day?"

"Just heard so, sir," was the reply.

"Will their coming interfere with you?"

"Not much, sir. Don't be uneasy, I can manage."

"I know you are a man of great resources, Minshull?"

"Yes, I flatter myself I am. But this is so unexpected. I wonder why my mistress didn't take me into her confidence. She generally does."

"You will certainly want some assistance, Minshull," said Stanley. "You can't do all the work yourself."

"I don't know what I can do till I try, sir. But I've no doubt her ladyship will make some allowances."

"I'm sure she will," replied Stanley. "And now mark what I say. Take the greatest care that Sister Aline does not hear of Lady Starkey's arrival, or it will most likely frighten her away."

"Rely upon that," replied the old servant.

About half an hour later, a smart-looking open carriage, hired at the railway station at Chester, drove up to Brereton Hall.

In it were Lady Starkey and her niece; and on the front seat were placed a couple of large trunks, together with several boxes, distinctly proclaiming that the fair owners had brought with them a goodly supply of dresses, and other articles likely to be required for their adornment during their stay. By the side of the coachman sat a very pretty lady's-maid.

No sooner did the two ladies make their appearance than Stanley and his mother came forth to bid them welcome; and loud were the expressions of delight on both sides at the meeting. The visitors were likewise greatly struck by the old mansion, and loudly expressed their admiration of its picturesque beauty.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lady Starkey, lifting up her hands.

"What a remarkably pretty place you have made of it! I declare it is one of the nicest old houses I ever beheld! Don't you think so, Rose?"

"Indeed I do, aunty," replied the other. "I really was not prepared for such a charming place."

"Well, come with me!" cried Stanley, handing them out of the carriage. "I'm persuaded the interior of the house won't disappoint you."

"On the contrary, it far surpasses my expectations," cried Lady Starkey, as she stood still in the entrance hall and looked round.

"There's a staircase!" she exclaimed. "Perfect! isn't it Rose?"

"Quite perfect, aunty. And the gallery beyond! What a picture one could make of it!"

"I hope you may paint it," said Stanley.

"Nothing I should like better," she replied.

Stanley then led them to the great banqueting-hall, with which they seemed still more delighted, and they remained for some time gazing at the old family portraits, and trying to discover a likeness between Stanley and some of his ancestors.

While they were thus occupied old Minshull came in to say that the coachman wished to depart, upon which Lady Starkey paid him and dismissed him.

Not since Stanley restored the old hall had he passed so pleasant an hour as he had on that afternoon.

Very little credit had been given him by his wife for what he had done, so that the commendations now bestowed upon him by Lady Starkey and Rose were doubly welcome.

Under the circumstances, it was extremely annoying to him to leave them so soon, but they readily accepted his excuse, and agreed to postpone any further inspection of the place until next day.

"I am quite charmed with what I have already seen," observed Lady Starkey; "and I make no doubt that a still greater treat is in store for me."

"I can't promise that," said Stanley. "But there are several rooms that you have not yet looked at."

"I hope you will allow us to see the Haunted Chamber," said Rose. "I have the greatest curiosity to behold it."

Stanley looked quite confused by the request.

"You mustn't ask to see that room," he said.

"Why not?" rejoined Rose.

"I have a reason for refusal—but don't ask me to explain."

"Well, I must own I'm greatly disappointed," said Rose; "but perhaps you'll relent to-morrow."

Stanley made no reply, but immediately afterwards took leave, hoping to see them next day.

He found Minshull in the entrance hall, and being struck with a new idea, called to the old servant to follow him, and hurried up the great staircase to the gallery. His object was to inform Sister Aline of the arrival that had just occurred, and ascertain what she thought of it.

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## IX.

### LADY STARKEY AND ROSE HYLTON AT BRERETON HALL.

ON a slight signal, Sister Aline immediately opened the door and Stanley went into the room, Minshull remaining outside.

"Have you heard what has happened?" said Stanley.

"I have just been told by Minshull that Lady Starkey and her niece have arrived at the hall," she said. "But I feel no uneasiness on that account, for I am sure they won't disturb me."

"Every precaution shall be taken to secure you from intrusion," said Stanley. "But the difficulties have somewhat increased, for Miss Rose Hylton wants to see this chamber, and though, of course, I shall not grant the request, you must keep the door fastened."

"It is always fastened," replied Sister Aline. "I only open it to Minshull or the old woman."

"But even greater caution will be necessary," said Stanley. "Recollect that there are now two more ladies and a lady's-maid in the house."

"I am quite aware of it," replied Sister Aline. "Lady Starkey's unlooked-for arrival has suggested something to me. I have long and deeply desired an interview with her, in the hope of obtaining her forgiveness."

"I do not think she will grant you an interview," replied Stanley, gravely. "It would be useless, therefore, to make the request."

"Nothing would induce me to intrude upon her," said Sister Aline; "or even approach her—save with her permission. I will, therefore, dismiss the thought which I ought not, perhaps, to have indulged for a single moment. But when her name was mentioned to me, and I found she was here—in the same house—I could scarcely repress my desire to fling myself at her feet, and implore her forgiveness."

So much pain and contrition were depicted in the recluse's countenance that Stanley was deeply moved.

After reflecting for a few minutes, he said :

"I have somewhat altered my mind. Perhaps another opportunity of an interview with Lady Starkey may not occur. I, therefore, advise you not to neglect it. Go to her room to-night. Minshull will show it you. It is the largest in the gallery. Pass through the dressing-room, and you will gain the other chamber without difficulty."

"I will go there at midnight," replied Sister Aline, eagerly.

"And I trust you may be successful in your effort. Farewell!"

And he hastily quitted the room.

The party at Beaucliffe were greatly surprised at the tidings brought them by Stanley of the sudden arrival of Lady Starkey and her niece at Brereton Hall, as they had heard nothing whatever of any invitation being sent them.

Perhaps Mildred and Lady Talmash were not altogether pleased, but the squire was delighted, and at once proposed that Mrs. Brereton, with her guests, should be invited to dinner next day.

"I shall be delighted to see them here," he said. "And I sincerely hope they will come. In fact, I should like them to dine with us constantly while they are at Brereton."

"Not constantly, papa," remarked Mildred. "That would be rather too much. I am not so very fond of Rose, and don't think she particularly likes me."

"Oh! you are mistaken," cried Stanley. "She admires you greatly."

"My wish is to make Lady Starkey feel quite at home here," said the squire. "I should like her to come whenever she pleases, and bring her niece with her. I hope you won't interfere."

"Certainly not," replied Mildred. "I dare say we shall get on very well together."

"You'll find Rose extremely amiable, I can assure you," remarked Stanley. "But you must recollect she is a great invalid, and unequal to much exertion."

"All that shall be carefully considered," rejoined Mildred. "I won't suggest any long rides on horseback to her."

"She takes no horse exercise whatever," said Stanley.

"Such a life wouldn't be worth living, in my opinion," remarked Mildred.

"One thing I must mention before I forget it," said the squire to Stanley. "Who do you think we saw this morning?"

"Can't tell," replied the other.

"Darcy," replied the squire. "We saw him near Knutsford,"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Stanley, glancing at Lady Talmash. "Then his departure was only a pretence."

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## X.

### THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN LADY STARKEY AND SISTER ALINE.

It was near midnight, and Lady Starkey, who was somewhat fatigued with her journey, was fast asleep in the antique bed that adorned the principal room in the gallery at Brereton.

Suddenly, some sound awoke her, and as a light was burning in the chamber, she became aware of a dark figure in a religious dress, standing at the foot of the bed.

For a few minutes she could not muster courage to address the supposed apparition, but at length she spoke.

"Who and what are you?" she asked, in trembling accents, scarcely expecting an answer.

"I have something to say to you," replied the phantom, in low and almost unearthly tones.

"Do you belong to the living or the dead?" said Lady Starkey.

"I still belong to the living," replied the figure, "but I have little to do with the world. Before I depart I would be at peace with all, and chiefly with you."

"Wherefore with me?" cried Lady Starkey.

"Because I have greatly wronged you," replied Sister Aline, "and I cannot hope for rest or freedom from remorse till I obtain your forgiveness."

"What do I hear?" cried Lady Starkey. "Your word awaken thoughts in my breast that I would willingly banish. I only know one person who has done me great wrong, and that person I cannot forgive."

"Wherefore not?" said Sister Aline, in a supplicatory tone.

"The injury is too great," replied Lady Starkey, who now began to think she recognised the supposed spiritual visitant.

"But I will make every atonement in my power," cried Sister Aline. "No penance so severe that I will not perform."

"Pain and suffering on your part will not gratify me, for I seek not vengeance," said Lady Starkey. "No torture I could inflict on you would be so exquisite as that you have inflicted on me. But that is past, and the wrong can never be redressed. You must seek for forgiveness from an all merciful Judge. I would forgive you if I could. But I should merely pronounce words without meaning and without effect."

"Then you bid me depart," cried Sister Aline, in accents of despair. "Give me, at least a hope that you will not always withhold forgiveness from me."

"I can make no promise," said Lady Starkey, coldly. "And I must forbid you ever to approach me again."

"Oh, say not so!" exclaimed Sister Aline.

"Begone! Your presence troubles me," said Lady Starkey.

"I obey," said Sister Aline. "But before I depart let

me say that this step which has so much displeased you was counselled by Stanley Brereton. Furthermore, let me entreat you not to breathe a word concerning me to Mrs. Brereton till you have consulted with her son."

"So far I will comply with your request," replied Lady Starkey. "But why are you here?"

"In the hope of defeating the designs of a villain who would destroy the happiness of a lovely young creature. She has foolishly listened to him, but I still hope to save her."

"And you have come here with that object?"

"With that object alone."

"Then I will willingly aid you."|

"I think I can accomplish my purpose unaided. But should I fail I will leave the task to you."

"And I will not shrink from it," said Lady Starkey. "I do not think I can be wrong in concluding that the dangerous villain you have referred to is Darcy?"

"You have guessed rightly," replied Sister Aline. "And the lovely creature for whom he has spread his snares is Stanley Brereton's wife. But should you converse with her on the subject beware what you say, or you may cause irreparable mischief. The present moment is fraught with the greatest peril to the fair Mildred. But I still hope to save her."

Ere Lady Starkey could put another question, Sister Aline was gone.

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## XI.

### MILDRED'S FLIGHT.

WHEN Lady Starkey came down to breakfast next morning, both Mrs. Brereton and Rose were struck with her changed expression.

She accounted for it by saying she had passed a very restless night, but there was an anxiety in her looks that did not seem merely caused by want of sleep.

She was very careful not to say anything that might imply a doubt as to her belief in the perfect happiness of the young couple at Beaucliffe, but she could not help expressing surprise that they did not live at Brereton.

"At first Stanley was very much put out," said Mrs. Brereton; "but he now seems reconciled to the arrangement."

They had not long finished breakfast when the whole party came over from Beaucliffe, Mildred being brought by her father in order to give a general invitation to the ladies.

Now that Lady Starkey had learnt the young wife's secret she could not but regard her with the deepest interest, and hoped she might be exposed to no further danger.

As to the fair creature whose thoughtless conduct occasioned so much anxiety among those around her, she seemed as gay and unconcerned as if she had not a care.

She had ridden over that morning, and as nothing suited her so well as a riding-habit, she was seen to the greatest advantage. Knowing what she did Lady Starkey regarded her with wonder. Could she be so thoughtless as she had been represented? Could she listen to such a man as Darcy?

Lady Starkey thought it quite impossible, and began to doubt everything that had been told her to the lovely creature's disadvantage.

Nothing could be more agreeable than the manner in which Mildred delivered her father's invitation to the two ladies. She told them he would always be delighted to see them at Beaucliffe, and begged them to come whenever they felt inclined.

A manner like this could not fail to produce a favourable impression. Lady Starkey was charmed with her.

At length an opportunity occurred for a little private converse between Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash. Mildred and Rose had disappeared, and the squire was sitting with Mrs. Brereton in the library. The two first-mentioned ladies were walking in the garden, when Lady Starkey said:

"Captain Darcy has been at Beaucliffe lately, has he not? What has become of him? He has not returned to town."

"I thought he was gone," replied Lady Talmash. "But we saw him yesterday, while we were riding out near Knutsford."

"What can he be doing here?" remarked Lady Starkey, looking inquiringly at her.

"I really cannot tell," replied Lady Talmash. "No good, I'm afraid. But it seems necessary I should inform your ladyship that he paid a great deal too much attention to Stanley's charming wife, and I was obliged to speak to him on the subject."

"Did he attend to the hint?"

"Apparently so. He immediately left the house, and promised not to trouble us again. But he is here still, as I have said."

"That is very vexatious," said Lady Starkey.

"At any cost we must get rid of him," cried Lady Talmash. "He cannot be allowed to remain here."

"Is there any danger in his presence, think you?" asked Lady Starkey.

"A great deal," replied Lady Talmash. "He has fallen desperately in love with Mildred, and will not abandon the pursuit."

"But you don't think she would be led away by him?" cried Lady Starkey, looking aghast.

"She's so very thoughtless that she might take the fatal step without reflecting on its consequences. Were she to do so I think it would kill her excellent father."

"She must never be allowed to take that step," said Lady Starkey. "Rather than run the risk of such a sad mischance, I will warn Mr. Warburton."

"That will be useless. He will never believe in the danger, though it is palpable to every one else. And Stanley is just as blind. The mischief will be done before they are aware of it."

"I must now tell you that since I came here I have met a person who undertakes to free us from this great danger," said Lady Starkey.

"Is it a woman?" asked Lady Talmash.

"It is."

"She overrates her power. Darcy can only be driven hence by Stanley."

"Here he comes," said Lady Starkey, as Stanley entered the garden. "We have been talking over your affairs," she added to him, "and have come to the conclusion that you must act energetically."

"What would you have me do?" he asked.

"Drive Darcy from this neighbourhood," she replied.

"I will, if I can find him," he said. "But where is he?"

"Somewhere near Knutsford. You must make inquiries."

"I will do so to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?" demanded Lady Talmash.

"Because I expect some assistance will be rendered me, and I may do more harm than good if I am too precipitate."

"Where is your wife?" asked Lady Talmash. "I don't see her in the garden."

"Most likely she is at the stables," replied Stanley.

"Let us go thither," said Lady Talmash.

Accordingly, they quitted the garden and went towards the stables, but as they were proceeding thither they met a groom, who told them that about half an hour before, Mrs. Stanley Brereton had mounted her horse, and ridden back by herself to Beaucliffe.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Stanley, surprised. "Did no one attend her?"

"No, sir," replied the groom. "I offered to go with her myself, but she declined."

"This is strange!" said Lady Talmash.

"Very strange, I should think," cried Lady Starkey. And she added in a low tone to Stanley, "You ought to follow, and look after her."

"She would not be pleased if I did," he replied.

"This is an unusual circumstance," said Lady Starkey.

"You can't tell what has happened. It's your duty to go."

"Well, if your ladyship entertains that opinion, I'll set off at once," he replied; "though I'm sure she'll be displeased with me. Here, Tom," he added to the groom, "saddle my horse, and bring him out at once."

The groom went immediately to the stables.

"I can't help suspecting something," whispered Lady Talmash to the other. "I haven't a horse here, to-day, or I'd gallop over myself."

In another minute the groom came out, and Stanley sprang on his horse.

"I shall be back very shortly," he said, as he dashed off, "and I hope to bring you word that all's right."

As he turned round he saw they were watching him, and being now excited, he galloped all the way to Beaucliffe.

On arriving there he began to feel rather foolish, thinking Mildred would laugh at him; but when he entered the courtyard he found two or three servants there, and inquired whether his wife had returned. To his great surprise, they replied in the negative.

Not wishing to excite their curiosity, he made some slight observation, and then started back again as quickly as he came.

Both ladies were still standing near the stables, and they guessed from his looks what had happened.

"I see you have not found her," cried Lady Talmash, running to meet him. "Depend upon it, she is gone."

"No doubt of it," said Lady Starkey. "Of course you will start instantly in pursuit."

"Whither shall I go?" he asked with a distracted look.

"To Knutsford," replied Lady Talmash. "You will learn something there."

"I have very little hope of finding her," he rejoined. "But, till you see me again, say not a word about her flight to Mr. Warburton or my mother."

"Your injunctions shall be strictly attended to, and we pray that you may be successful," said Lady Talmash.

Dashing through the gate which had been left open, Stanley galloped off, nor did he slacken his pace in the slightest degree till he reached Knutsford.

On entering the town, he rode at once to the Angel Inn, and inquired for Captain Darcy, but could learn nothing of him. The Captain had left on the previous day, and was most probably gone to London. Stanley next asked whether Mrs. Stanley Brereton had been there that morning, and was told that she had not.

Moreover, the landlord felt quite certain that she had not been in Knutsford that day. Had it been otherwise, he or his wife or some of his establishment must infallibly have seen her.

Stanley made many further inquiries, but none that led to any satisfactory result.

He next proceeded to the railway station, and found that several persons had travelled by Crewe to Euston Station, but whether Darcy and Mildred were among them, he could not ascertain. Certain it was that he had lost all trace of them for the present.

For nearly two hours he remained at Knutsford, and employed his time in sending telegraphic messages in different directions, but they brought him no serviceable information. In fact, as time went on, he became more and more convinced that his wife was gone. How her father would bear the dreadful truth when presented to him he did not dare to think.

Only by a great effort could Stanley prevail upon himself to return to Brereton. He quite dreaded the painful interview he must of necessity have with the squire, and now regretted that he had not entrusted the task to the two ladies.

The worthy old gentleman had been lingering at Brereton in the expectation that his darling daughter would join him there; but as time went on, and she did not return, he became exceedingly uneasy, and his anxiety increased, because he could obtain no satisfactory explanation from Lady Starkey or Lady Talmash. Mindful of their promise to Stanley, they did not even hint to him that she might be gone, and he seemed to suspect nothing. Mrs. Brereton and Rose were equally unsuspicious, and sat quietly conversing together in the library.

When Stanley returned from Knutsford, the squire was in the entrance hall, and immediately called out:

"Where have you left your wife? Where is she, I say?"

Stanley made no direct reply, but begged him to come into the dining-room, and as he complied, closed the door.

"Now, what the deuce is the matter?" asked the squire.

"I must beg you to summon all your firmness, sir," said Stanley.

"You alarm me," rejoined Mr. Warburton, whose countenance expressed great anxiety. "Tell me at once what has occurred."

"My desire is to spare you all possible pain, sir," said Stanley. "But you must learn the truth."

"Of course, rejoined the old gentleman, growing impatient. "What is it?"

"Well, then, I am obliged to inform you that your daughter is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed the squire, scarcely able to realise the terrible truth.

"Yes, she has left us both. She has gone away with Darcy.

"With Darcy!" exclaimed the old gentleman, with a mingled expression of rage and disgust, "I would rather you had told me of her death."

"I felt certain such would be your feeling, sir," said Stanley, with a deeply sympathising look.

"It will be useless to follow them," cried the squire, whose anger was quite unabated. "I shall not take her back, and I conclude you won't. Since she has fixed herself with this deceitful fellow, she must remain with him."

After walking rapidly to and fro within the room, for a few minutes, he suddenly stopped, and asked :

"Where do you think they are gone?"

"I have no clue whatever, sir," said Stanley "Perhaps, to London—perhaps, abroad."

"I care not where they go, since the step has been taken," said the squire. "But have you any proof that she has fled—or, is it only conjecture?"

"Only conjecture, at present, sir," replied Stanley. "But she is not to be found. I have been to Beaucliffe, and she has not been there, since she left this morning. Where can she be?"

"I know not," replied Mr. Warburton. "Stay! she may have left a letter. I saw her writing at that small table near the window at the further end of the room."

At this suggestion Stanley started off, and soon called out :  
"There *is* a letter."

In another instant he had seized it and torn it open.

Seeing the squire was watching him he said :

"The letter is for me, you shall hear it presently."

He then ran his eye hastily over it, and almost let it fall.

"Our worst fears are realised," he cried in a voice of anguish. "There is no longer any doubt. She is gone."

"Pray read her letter to me!" cried Mr. Warburton, coming towards him.

## XII.

## MILDRED'S LETTER.

"I HAVE ceased to love you, Stanley, and cannot, therefore remain with you longer.

"Once I loved you deeply, devotedly—far better than any one else—but that is long since past, and I will not profess affection I do not feel.

"I am about to leave you for ever. The resolution has been long taken, but I have only now found the courage to execute it.

"Forget me. You will be happier without me—happier with some one better suited to you.

"It will be useless to follow. You will not find me, and if you did I would not return with you. Again I say forget me, as I hope to forget you.

"But the real pang remains. How shall I quit my dearest father, whose love for me, throughout my life, has been unceasing? In what way shall I requite his affection? By the basest ingratitude!—it would seem so. Yet I would prove my love for him if I could.

"I implore his forgiveness. I do not deserve it, I do not expect it, but I trust it may not be refused. MILDRED."

When the letter was concluded, the agonised father, overcome by emotion, sank into a chair, and covered his brow with his hands.

Things had been in this state for a few minutes, when the door was opened, and Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash entered the room.

On perceiving the letter in Stanley's hand, both immediately comprehended what had occurred, and were deeply touched by the scene presented to them. It was impossible, indeed, not to sympathise with the squire's distress.

Laying her hand upon his shoulder, in the gentlest manner, Lady Talmash endeavoured to rouse him, and at length succeeded.

Brushing the tears from his eyes, he said in broken ac-

cents, "Well, you see I have lost her! The comfort of my old age is gone. What shall I do without her?"

"It is sad, indeed!" exclaimed her ladyship in tones of deepest sympathy. "But, perhaps, it is better now than later."

"Am I to blame in any way?" asked the squire. "Have I done aught to cause this dire calamity?"

"One thing only," replied Lady Talmash. "You brought this Darcy to the house."

"True," he replied with a groan, "I now see the error I committed. But I had the most perfect confidence in my daughter."

"Read this," said Stanley, giving the letter to the two ladies; "you will then be able to form an exact opinion upon the case."

Two or three minutes were occupied in the perusal of the letter, during which the looks of both ladies expressed amazement and indignation.

"Act on her advice, and forget her," said Lady Starkey to Stanley, as she gave him back the letter. "She does not deserve to be remembered."

"Is that all the counsel you have to give me?" he asked. "Shall I follow her?"

"No," replied Lady Starkey. "Even if you found her, which is doubtful, she evidently would not return with you."

"I am quite of the same opinion," added Lady Talmash. "You will only inflict further suffering on yourself, and on her excellent father, by any steps you may take for her recovery. Dearly as I loved Mildred—and I did love her dearly—I shall henceforward banish her from my heart. I recommend you to do likewise."

"Lady Talmash is right," observed the squire, who heard what was said. "No weakness must be shown. So little can I trust myself that were my unfortunate daughter to present herself before me and implore my pardon I should infallibly forgive her. This must not be. We must be firm."

"Am I to understand, sir," said Stanley, "that it is your express wish that no further steps be taken for the present?"

"Not unless we receive some positive intelligence," said the old gentleman. "And I do not think that at all likely. But I shall not return until late to Beaucliffe." Then, addressing himself to the two ladies, he begged them to send

Mrs. Brereton to him. "I want to talk to her in private on this most painful affair," he said, "and make no doubt that I shall derive great comfort from her discourse."

"We will send her immediately," replied the two ladies, as they quitted the room with Stanley.

But nearly half an hour elapsed before Mrs. Brereton went to the squire, and she then found him fast asleep in an easy-chair, and did not disturb him.

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### XIII.

#### SISTER ALINE COMMANDS MILDRED TO RETURN.

Two persons have just entered a large well-furnished private room in the principal hotel of the ancient city of Chester.

One of them, a lovely young creature, wears a riding-habit, that sets off her light and graceful figure to the utmost advantage.

Apparently she has come from a distance, for she seems somewhat fatigued, and flinging herself upon a sofa, takes off her hat and lets loose a profusion of the loveliest golden tresses.

An officer is with her, who is evidently desperately enamoured, and watches her every movement with admiration. He is tall, well-built, with very striking features, and a dark complexion.

Following her to the sofa, he takes her hand, already divested of the glove, and raises it to his lips.

Passionately devoted is the look he fixes upon her, as he exclaims:

"Now you are mine."

It is evident that the room has been prepared for them. A cloth has been laid on the dining-table, and all other necessary preparations made, and a waiter now comes in to inquire whether he shall serve the repast, and is answered in the affirmative.

The pair, who will be easily recognised, seem in good spirits, and not even the lady manifests any compunction at the perilous step she has taken, for she laughs as gaily as usual.

Presently a couple of waiters enter, and placing several small dishes on the table, together with iced champagne and a flask of Malmsey Madeira, serve the guests, and then discreetly retire.

The fugitives, who do not seem to have lost their appetites by the ride, are still in full enjoyment of the dinner, which comprises many delicacies, and Mildred has just raised a second glass of champagne to her lips, when a strange and startling interruption occurs.

The door suddenly opens, not to admit a waiter with a further supply of good things, but a lady, clad in a dark religious garb, and looking like a nun.

Closing the door after her, this strange intruder walks quickly up to Mildred, and caring nothing for the alarm she causes, lays her hand upon the runaway wife's arm, and says, in a stern, authoritative tone :

"I have come to bid you return forthwith to the husband you have quitted."

Already Darcy has sprung up in his seat, and calls out fiercely :

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?"

But Sister Aline utterly disregards him, and again addresses Mildred, who shrinks from her with terror.

"Return with me, I say, to your husband and your father, and all will yet be well. Come at once, and I promise you forgiveness. It will be useless to resist. I have followed you from Brereton Hall, and will not return without you."

"Send this mad woman away," almost shrieked Mildred. "She frightens me to death!"

But Darcy felt that a scene must not be made, and resolved to proceed cautiously.

"Who are you?" he said to Sister Aline. "Methinks, I have seen you before."

"You ought to remember me, Captain Darcy," she rejoined, with a look that froze his blood. "I was with Sir Thomas Starkey when he was shot by you at Dieppe."

"I thought so," he answered, with a shudder.

"After that terrible event," continued Sister Aline, "I

entered a religious retreat, and only came forth to rescue this thoughtless creature from your toils. Nor will I desist from my task till I have accomplished it. I will save her. She shall come back with me. Come, madam!"

And she held out her hand to Mildred.

But the latter resolutely refused obedience to her behest.

"I will only be taken by force," she said. "And I call on Captain Darcy to protect me."

Sister Aline regarded her in anger and astonishment.

"Are you determined to sacrifice yourself thus!" she cried.

"Now is your time of safety. Be warned! be warned!"

"Nothing can turn me!" said Mildred, in a firm tone.

"My resolution is taken. You waste time here. Begone!"

Sister Aline looked imploringly at her, but the appeal proved vain! and checking the terrible malediction that rose to her lips, she rushed out of the room.

As nothing further occurred, they concluded she was gone.

But the danger was not over.

"We must not remain here," said Darcy.

"Where shall we go," asked Mildred.

"To France," he replied. "We will cross to Boulogne to-night. They won't follow us there."

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#### XIV.

##### HOW THE SQUIRE RETURNED TO BEAUCLIFFE.

As might naturally be expected, all was thrown into confusion by Mildred's sudden flight.

The squire, as we are aware, had intended to give a little dinner on that day to Lady Starkey and Rose, but the design was abandoned, and he remained to dine quietly with Mrs. Brereton, who did the best she could for him and the others.

After dinner, Lady Starkey had retired to her own room, and was thinking over what had happened, when the door communicating with the dressing-room was opened, and Sister Aline came in.

"I thought I should see you," said her ladyship. "Do you bring any tidings of the fugitive?"

"Yes," she replied sadly. "I found her at Chester with Darcy, but could not induce her to return."

"I feared it would prove so," said Lady Starkey. "Who would have thought that one so well married, and blessed with such a happy home, would fling all away as she has done? It looks like madness."

"It is little better than madness," rejoined Sister Aline. "I pity both husband and father, but chiefly Mr. Warburton, as I am sure his love for her is deepest."

"Undoubtedly it will be a very severe blow to him. Can you offer him any consolation?"

"None whatever," replied Sister Aline. "Were I to describe the exact impression she produced on me, he would think I exaggerated. Conduct more heartless cannot be conceived. I wish he could forget her, but that I fear is impossible. However, I will do the best I can. Bid Stanley bring him to my chamber, and I will try to reason with him."

So saying she retired, and Lady Starkey immediately afterwards went down stairs and told Stanley what she had just heard.

An explanation had then to be given to the squire, who expressed a most anxious desire to see Sister Aline. Accordingly, he and Stanley went to her room.

She at once admitted them, and Mr. Warburton said to her eagerly:

"I am told you have seen my daughter since her flight?"

"I have," she replied, "and she seemed as gay as if she had been on a wedding excursion. My best efforts were used to induce her to return—but without avail. She is gone, and you must endeavour to reconcile yourself to her loss. I can give you no consolation."

"I hardly like to say it, sir," interposed Stanley, "but I think you are best without her."

The unhappy father could not repress a groan.

"The extraordinary kindness you have shown her merits a very different return," said Sister Aline. "But you must try to bear your heavy disappointment. I repeat I can give you no consolation, or I would gladly do so. As far as I can judge, she had forgotten both husband and father, and their wisest course will be to forget her."

"That will be impossible," said the squire; "so I shall not make the attempt."

"For my own part," said Stanley, "I am resolved to have a speedy satisfaction for the deep wrong inflicted upon me, and with that purpose I shall follow the fugitives to-morrow."

"Weigh well your determination," said the squire. "If any man deserves punishment it is Darcy, for he has betrayed the confidence placed in him in the basest manner, but I do not think it will mend the matter to kill him."

"Remember that he shot Sir Thomas Starkey," said Sister Aline. "That constitutes an additional motive for vengeance."

"I have not forgotten it," said Stanley, sternly.

"Wait till to-morrow," said the squire. "And we can then decide what shall be done. I did not mean to return to Beauchliffe to-night, but have again changed my mind."

"I will go with you, sir," said Stanley.

They then took leave of Sister Aline, and quitted the room.

Since the squire, at the last moment, had determined to return, Lady Talmash announced her intention of accompanying him, and begged Rose to go with her.

Accordingly, the carriage was ordered, and Mr. Warburton and Stanley with the two ladies drove to Beauchliffe.

On arriving at the house, the squire experienced a great shock, and would have fallen as he entered, had not Stanley supported him.

The sight of the many attached servants, collected in the hall to express their sympathy, affected him deeply.

He waved his hand in recognition, seized a candle, and, hurrying up stairs with Stanley, who attended him to the last, sought his chamber. Many a tearful eye followed him.

## XV.

## THE PORTRAIT.

THE squire scarcely slept at all that night, and was in such a highly feverish state next morning that it was found necessary to have advice.

Accordingly an old medical practitioner, who had long attended him, was sent for, and by this gentleman he was ordered to remain in bed and keep as quiet as possible. The poor squire was very unwilling to comply with these injunctions, but there was no help for it, for when he attempted to arise he felt quite light-headed and unable to stand.

Very little was said to him about his daughter, though he was most anxious to obtain further particulars of her flight, but he contrived to extort a promise from Stanley not to set off in pursuit of Darcy without his consent, which it was quite evident he did not mean to grant.

The squire's bedroom was large and handsome, and over the chimney-piece hung a portrait of Mildred, taken about two years previously.

This portrait—a very beautiful work of art—was a great comfort to him at this painful juncture. The curtains of the bed were drawn back, so that he could contemplate the lovely features while reclining on his pillow; and it may be safely said that they had never pleased him so much before.

"I may never behold her again," he thought, "but I shall always have that portrait with me; and I must take good care of it."

Mr. Warburton did not improve so rapidly as those around him anticipated. Up to this date he had never really known a day's illness—his constitution being so robust that he could shake off an ordinary ailment at once. But now the blow proved too much for him. His moral system gave way. During a few days the fever increased, and for a short time seemed to affect his brain, and he rambled a good deal about Mildred.

During this critical period Lady Starkey came over to Beaucliffe, and she and Lady Talmash watched by turns at the squire's couch. We will not venture to assert that his life was saved by this gentle nursing—though the old surgeon was of that opinion—and certainly no man could have been more fortunate in regard to nurses than Mr. Warburton, for even Rose came and sat by his side.

But there was another person, whom the squire wished to see, and he spoke to Stanley about her. This was Sister Aline. The recluse had produced a great impression upon him, and he wished to converse with her. Would she come, now and then, and sit by him at night? Stanley had no doubt she would, and promised to ask her. Next day, he brought word that she would come, and in the evening the carriage was sent for her.

On her arrival, she was met by Stanley, and at once taken to the squire's room. Lady Starkey was still there, but she immediately arose, and after bidding the squire good night, departed. Stanley left at the same time.

Sister Aline then knelt down, and prayed long and fervently; after which she arose and took Lady Starkey's seat.

"I wished to see you," said the squire, "as I have something to say to you. For several days I have not mentioned my daughter's name to any one. Can you give me any information respecting her?"

"One of the sisters has written to tell me that she has gone with Darcy to Boulogne; and I believe it to be true. Probably they will go on to Paris, and perhaps to Italy."

"In any case, I shall never behold her again," said Mr. Warburton.

"You can scarcely regret that," said Sister Aline.

"Not now," replied the squire. "I have conquered the strong affection I once had for her, and wish never again to meet her, if I can help it, as the meeting would give me the greatest pain. You do not, I suppose, advise a reconciliation between us?"

"Certainly not, as long as she remains with Darcy. Were she to quit him, and lead a life of penitence, I should counsel you to forgive her. But not now. Her heart, I trust, may be changed, but till I am satisfied it is so, I would reject her, were she to seek admission to a religious retreat. She has had her chance of restoration, but she has thrown it away."

"Are you willing to visit her again, and endeavour to bring her back from her errors?"

"I doubt whether she could be brought back," replied Sister Aline; "but I am certain it is a task far beyond my power—and I will not attempt it."

"Do not relinquish it without due consideration."

"But I may fail—and failure would to me be dreadful."

"With your earnestness and zeal, I do not think you can fail," said the squire.

"Well, I will reflect seriously upon the matter to-night, and tell you what I think in the morning. Say nothing more to me now."

Mr. Warburton leaned back on his pillow, and became perfectly silent.

That night he slept a few hours and awoke considerably refreshed next morning.

He was very anxious to learn whether Sister Aline was willing to undertake the task he had proposed to her.

"I have thought the matter over," she said, "and though I doubt whether I shall succeed, I am willing to set out on the mission."

"When will you go?" asked the squire.

"Without delay," she replied. "I have nothing now to detain me here. I shall proceed at once to Boulogne, and if I do not find them there will go on to Paris."

"Then pray take that pocket-book with you," said Mr. Warburton, pointing to one lying on a chair beside the bed. "It contains bank-notes, and you will need a supply of money with you. Should you require more hereafter, write to me, and it shall be sent at once."

"When I have anything to communicate, you shall hear from me," said Sister Aline.

"Is it your intention to set out at once?" asked the squire. "If so the carriage shall be ordered for you."

"I should like the carriage to take me to Chester."

"Your wishes in that respect shall be attended to, and anything else you may require," said Mr. Warburton.

At this moment Stanley entered the room.

"What sort of night have you passed?" he asked.

"The best since my attack," replied the squire. "But a change in the arrangements has taken place. Sister Aline is

about to return to France, and will require the carriage to take her to Chester."

"When will she start?" asked Stanley.

"As soon as she has breakfasted," replied the squire.

"Then I will go down and give the necessary orders," said Stanley, quitting the room.

"Say nothing to him as to the errand on which you are bent," remarked the squire.

"I did not intend to do so," she replied. "He would interfere with my purpose, and instead of bringing back the fugitive wife we should have a duel, in which Stanley himself might possibly be killed. I will now bid you farewell. I shall not attempt to bring your daughter back unless I am satisfied she is truly penitent. I feel the difficulty of my task, and if I fail, as I may do, you must not blame me. Keep yourself, I pray you, as composed as you can. Farewell! Heaven's peace be with you!"

On coming downstairs, Sister Aline was met by Stanley, who took her to the dining-room, where she made a slender breakfast. She then entered the carriage, which was already at the door, and drove off to Chester.

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## XVI.

### SISTER ALINE PROCEEDS TO BOULOGNE.

As Sister Aline travelled by the night mail, she reached Boulogne at an early hour next morning. She found that a very good set of rooms had been engaged at the Hôtel des Bains by the fugitive couple, and she resolved to present herself to Mildred as soon as practicable. This was more easily accomplished than she expected, for she found a door partially open, and on looking into the room she saw Mildred, who had just returned from a bath.

Determined to take advantage of the opportunity, she entered the room and closed the door after her. On recognising

her, the young lady would have insisted on her immediate departure, but Sister Aline said with great quickness, "I am the bearer of a message to you from your father, and I hope you will allow me to deliver it."

"Is he well?" asked Mildred.

"He has been very dangerously ill," replied Sister Aline; "and his mind has been affected. But he is somewhat better now."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mildred. "I did not suppose he would have suffered so much."

"Were you not aware that he loved you better than anything on earth?"

"I knew that he loved me—but not to that extent."

"He would have made any sacrifice for you. Nor do I think he would now refuse you forgiveness, were you to beg it from him."

"I must confess I should like to behold him again."

"Depend upon it, you will never be perfectly happy till you are reconciled to him."

"I, myself, am of that opinion—but I fear it can never be. Stanley and I have not more completely separated than my father and myself."

"True, but in my opinion your father would welcome you back, whereas no meeting can ever again take place between you and Stanley."

"I do not desire it," said Mildred.

"Before I leave, I wish to say a word to you," remarked Sister Aline. "If you are dissatisfied, go back to your father. I am certain he will receive you. Lead a new life. Once I was as indifferent to devotion and acts of penitence as yourself, but now these are my greatest comfort. Your excellent father is most anxious that your life should change, and I believe his prayers will prevail."

Just then Darcy entered the room, and absolutely started when he beheld Sister Aline.

"What! you here again?" he cried.

"Yes, I have been trying to prevail on Mildred to return to her father, who is still dangerously ill."

"I am very sorry for him," said Darcy. "But what can I do?"

"Send back his daughter."

"He would not take her back, were I to send her," said Darcy.

"You are mistaken," replied Sister Aline. "He has been looking for her daily. He felt certain she would never remain with you."

"Tell my father I will never leave Captain Darcy," cried Mildred.

"Mr. Warburton will not believe that message," said Sister Aline.

"Say to Mr. Warburton, from me," observed Darcy, "that nothing shall induce me to give up his daughter. Circumstances, I hope, will enable me, before long, to marry her—and then we shall both be entirely happy. But think not you will prevail on Mildred to leave me and return. That she never will."

"Never!" cried Mildred. "I am grieved for my father, who is the kindest of men, but I have no pity for my husband. I have never loved him since I married him—nor has he loved me. His affections were fixed on Rose Hylton, and I hope he will marry her, should a divorce be obtained. It must have been evident to all—even to my father, I should think—that ours was never likely to prove a happy union. We were scarcely ever together. Stanley set out every morning, immediately after breakfast, for Brereton, where he remained during the day, while I amused myself as I best could at Beaucliffe. But I was not satisfied with this kind of life, though I bore it for some time without a murmur. I became a prey to the most terrible ennui. At last an accident brought Captain Darcy to the house, and I obtained a new interest. He made himself agreeable to me, and I began to like him—far better than Stanley. He perceived this, and paid me still greater attention, and I was soon fast bound to him by love's chains. Lady Talmash tried to check this growing attachment, but it was already far beyond her power. However, she was resolved that he should leave the house, and after an interview had taken place between them he departed. But though he was driven from Beaucliffe, I heard constantly from him. The thoughts of quitting my husband gave me little pain, for by this time I had lost even the slight regard I entertained for him, but I seriously dreaded leaving my dear father, as I knew how deeply my flight would grieve him—and more than once my

departure was postponed. Eventually it was settled that I should start from Brereton, while Darcy was to wait for me on horseback, about five miles off on the road to Chester. On that morning, I believe, I appeared light and unconcerned, but I never felt more anxious. Just before I was about to start I went behind my father and kissed his hand, but in a careless manner, so as not to attract any particular attention. Stanley, I felt sure, would give me no trouble. Nor did he. He scarcely said a word to me that morning. Such was our farewell. I have no regard for Brereton, and I care not if I never behold the place again, but I gave one look at the house, as I dashed through the gates. I then galloped off—not that I feared pursuit—but I wanted excitement—and didn't stop till I found Darcy."

"And never was I so delighted as when I beheld you," he said. "I had been waiting there nearly two hours, full of uneasiness. Your appearance put all fears to flight, and we then went on to Chester."

"You will not, I conclude, return with me to your father," said Sister Aline to Mildred.

"I cannot," she replied.

"Nor can I expect you, after the explanation you have given me. Not till now did I know what you had sacrificed on quitting your father."

"She has sacrificed a large fortune," said Darcy. "If you return to Beaucliffe tell Mr. Warburton he ought to make a fresh settlement. The present settlement will merely benefit Stanley Brereton."

"Tell him to wait till he ascertains whether a divorce can be obtained for us," said Mildred; "and act accordingly. My father, I am sure, will never knowingly do an injustice."

"I will tell him exactly what you have told me, and leave him to decide," replied Sister Aline.

"That is all I ask," said Mildred. "My conduct, I feel, must appear dreadful to my dear father. But implore him to put the best construction he can upon it. I was wretched, though he did not perceive it."

"I cannot undertake to aid you much," said Sister Aline; "but I will lay before your father all you have told me concerning your unhappiness in your married state, and leave him to judge. Should he wish me to write to you, I will

write. Otherwise not. I do not desire to take any part in an affair of this kind."

"I shall for ever bless you if you can obtain my father's forgiveness for me," cried Mildred.

"I make no promise, but I will use my best efforts to accomplish that end. Farewell!"

Mildred would gladly have detained her, for she had much more to say; but Darcy seemed to think that the interview had lasted quite long enough. He therefore conducted Sister Aline with the utmost respect to the entrance of the hotel, and would have placed her on board the steamboat, had she desired it.

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## XVII.

### A CHANGE TAKES PLACE IN MR. WARBURTON'S FEELINGS TOWARDS HIS DAUGHTER.

MR. WARBURTON was not quite so well as he had been when Sister Aline came back to Beaucliffe. The fever had returned, and brought with it rather more mental excitement. Under these circumstances she had to be careful what she told him.

But next day he became much calmer, and she then informed him of her interview with Mildred at Boulogne.

He listened to all she had to tell with the deepest interest, but seemed much vexed and disappointed that his daughter would not return.

"She does not deem her conduct so culpable as you and her husband do, sir," she said; "and thinks that many and great excuses might be made for her. Amongst others, she affirms that she has long lost all affection for Stanley, and asserts that he is equally indifferent to her. She likewise declares that neglect on his part made her wretched at the commencement of her married life, though she uttered no complaint."

"I am truly grieved to hear it," said the squire. "But I believed she loved him."

"I must next inform you," said Sister Aline, "that the fugitives hope to obtain a divorce, and marry."

"I have no desire that they should marry," said the squire, sternly.

"They have no option," said Sister Aline. "Do not place a fresh obstacle in their path."

"Should she marry Darcy, I will never behold her again," said the squire.

"Do not make that declaration, sir," rejoined Sister Aline. "Do not cut away your daughter's sole chance of happiness, which lies in a union with Darcy. Rather aid it."

"I cannot do that," said the squire. "But I will not oppose it. The divorce is certain."

"In that case, the marriage will immediately follow," said Sister Aline, "and then matters will be set completely right."

"Not completely," rejoined the squire, despondingly. "She will never be the same again."

"She will be happy if you will forgive her. Why condemn her to constant unhappiness, when a few kind words from you would relieve her from a weight of anxiety? I believe you have as good a heart as man ever possessed, and certainly no one ever loved a daughter better than you have loved Mildred. That she has deceived you may excite your displeasure, but will not, I am sure, harden your heart altogether against her. To you it would be no satisfaction that she should suffer—nor would you desire that she should be punished as society punishes its offenders. For your own sake, as well as for hers, I entreat you to forgive her. I deeply regret the pain and anxiety you will have to endure while settling the matter—but you will feel very differently when all is over."

"You move me very much by what you say," rejoined Mr. Warburton, "and I believe the course you recommend will be the best. All my anger against my daughter has subsided, and in its place are nothing left but kindly feelings."

"I am glad that such a change has taken place," said Sister Aline; "and I will write to inform Mildred that you have become more tranquil. Shall I tell her that you may possibly write to her, ere long?"

"No," he replied. "As yet I fear I am not equal to the

task. But tell her to think of me with kindness—always with kindness. That we shall meet again, ere long, I do not doubt. But whether I can receive her as heretofore, I cannot say. I must consult with some of the ladies now staying in the house.”

“They will counsel you not to receive her—of that I am certain,” said Sister Aline.

“I am afraid so,” he replied.

“But you need not be governed by what they say.”

“I haven’t the courage to act otherwise.”

“Not where your daughter is concerned?”

“I mustn’t get blamed again. I will have an immediate consultation with Lady Starkey, and will let you know what she says. I hope you will remain here for a few days.”

“Willingly, if I can do good.”

“Of that there can be no doubt,” said the squire.

Just then the door opened, and Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash entered.

“Sister Aline will remain here for a week,” said the squire to Lady Talmash. “Be so good as to find her a room.”

“With the greatest pleasure,” replied the other. “Pray come with me.”

As soon as they were gone, Mr. Warburton begged Lady Starkey to be seated.

“I want the benefit of your ladyship’s advice,” he said. “I have just received a message from my daughter. She means to marry Darcy if she can obtain a divorce, which I doubt not will be accomplished. She is likewise desirous to return here after her marriage.”

“What!” cried Lady Starkey, quite startled. “Take up her abode once more with you? That is quite out of the question. However your inclinations may prompt you cannot do it.”

“I felt so,” replied the squire. “But before sending a positive refusal, I wished to consult your ladyship.”

“Mildred can never expect to re-enter this house,” said Lady Starkey, gravely. “She has forfeited all right to do so.”

“True,” groaned the squire; “but it would be such a comfort to me. I don’t know how I shall be able to get on without her. I have been thinking it over during my illness, and have come to the conclusion that unless Mildred is with

me I must leave Beacliffe. What can I do here by myself?"

"Oh, you can always get plenty of agreeable people to stay with you."

"But that won't exactly satisfy me," cried the squire. "No one will replace her."

"You fancy so just now," said Lady Starkey; "but you'll become reconciled to her loss in time. At all events, you must submit, since there's no help—for you can't have her again. Were she to return, nobody would come to the house, so you would dwell in solitude. No, you must abandon that idea. Fortunately for yourself you have several experienced lady-friends, who will take the management of your house if you desire it. I myself shall be delighted to give assistance for a few months, and then my post can be taken up by Lady Talmash or some one else."

"Your ladyship is very kind. I am sure I am infinitely indebted to you."

"I feel for you very much, Mr. Warburton," she said. "The plan I have suggested is the best that occurs to me, and I am quite certain I can make your house very comfortable. But you mustn't think of having Mildred and Darcy here. That will never do."

"Very well," replied the squire, with a look of resignation.

## XVIII.

## WHAT PASSED BETWEEN STANLEY AND ROSE.

Rose took no part in the consultations now going on as to the future management of Beaucliffe. She neither wished to interfere with her aunt nor Lady Talmash, but was quite ready to offer Stanley all the consolation in her power.

It was evident that Mildred's flight had awakened fresh hopes in her breast, and she could now look forward with a pleasureable expectation to the future.

Though Stanley continued to reside at Beaucliffe, he spent the greater part of each day at Brereton, and constantly talked over matters with Rose and his mother, either in the library or while walking on the lawn.

He spoke of himself as an injured husband, and complained very bitterly of the manner in which his wife had left him; but his mother told him he might think himself exceedingly fortunate in having got rid of her, and Rose's looks expressed the same opinion.

"It may not be very flattering to your vanity that Mildred should run away from you," said Mrs. Brereton. "But it is very well she has gone, for you could never have been happy with her."

"Perhaps not," he replied. "And though I may reconcile myself to her loss, I shall never be satisfied till I have called Darcy to account."

"He is said to be a dead shot," remarked Rose. "Why give him a chance of killing you?"

"I cannot otherwise avenge my honour," said Stanley.

"Then leave it unavenged," rejoined his mother. "This infamous Darcy has already killed my brother. He must not in like manner rob me of my son."

"In my opinion you will needlessly expose yourself by challenging him," said Rose. "You are not called upon to meet him."

"I think differently," said Stanley.

"Dismiss these silly notions," rejoined his mother. "Darcy has really rendered you an important service—if you could only view it in the right light—and you ought to feel grateful to him. Leave him alone, I say. My chief anxiety is about poor dear Mr. Warburton, whose recovery seems not yet quite assured."

"Oh! yes, I think it is," said Stanley.

"How Mildred could leave such an indulgent father I cannot understand," continued Mrs. Brereton.

"Nor I," added Rose. "She can have no real feeling. Should Mr. Warburton die, she will never be free from remorse."

"A woman without feeling is not likely to be troubled with remorse," said Mrs. Brereton.

And she left them, and passed through one of the French windows into the library.

Rose would have followed, but Stanley detained her.

"Don't go in just yet," he observed. "I have something to say to you."

"What is it?" she asked, looking as if she almost guessed what was coming.

"Do you think you could be happy as my wife?" he said.

"It won't do to make a second mistake."

"I'm quite sure I could," she replied. "I should be the happiest person possible were I allowed to indulge my regard for you."

"Ere long, I trust, the sole obstacle to our union will be removed," said Stanley.

"Heaven grant it may!" she exclaimed. "With such a prospect, why not tranquillise yourself? Above all, leave Darcy alone. Depend upon it, he will be sufficiently punished by the partner of his flight."

"I have no doubt of it," said Stanley.

"The person to be pitied is Mr. Warburton," said Rose. "To him his daughter is a real loss. What he will do without her I cannot conceive."

"He will easily find a wife, if he wants one," replied Stanley. "There are two ladies now at Beaucliffe, either of whom would accept him."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Rose. "But is he likely to choose one of them?"

"That I can't say," replied Stanley. "But now tell me, do you really like this house in all respects?"

"Yes, it exactly suits me. I feel I shall be perfectly happy here. I am very fond of your mother, and I think she likes me."

"I am sure she does," replied Stanley. "Under the circumstances, it is very fortunate that you agree so well together, since she must, of necessity, remain here."

"The house would lose one of its chief attractions if she were to quit it," said Rose. "To me she is a delightful companion, and I am always happy in her society. I am quite disposed to pay her all possible respect, and will do my best to please her. Nor will it be a difficult task. Already, I know something of her tastes, and can easily accommodate myself to them. She is fond of a quiet life, so am I. I like the country, quite as much as she does, and don't care much for town. I delight in a garden and all connected with it, so does she. Above all, this house suits us both perfectly. I don't think we shall disagree on a single point."

"I'm sure you won't," replied Stanley. "Hitherto, my experience has been precisely the reverse. My mother has never been interfered with—for that I would not allow—but her tastes have rarely been consulted."

"Well, you shall have no complaint on that score," said Rose. "I look on this as a very charming house, but I have a few plans to suggest which I think may turn out improvements."

"Suggest them to my mother," said Stanley. "She will feel flattered. Ah, there she is at the library window. She has come back to look after us. I must give her some notion of our intentions respecting her."

Accordingly, he stepped towards the window, and told her what had just passed between him and Rose.

Mrs. Brereton seemed highly pleased by the information.

"Only perform half your promise," she said, smiling at Rose; "and I shall be perfectly content."

"Depend upon it—if ever I have the opportunity—I will perform all," replied the young lady earnestly.

"Then, indeed, Brereton is sure to be a cheerful house," said the elderly lady.

Mrs. Brereton's regard for Rose had already become strong

affection. She discovered in her so many suitable qualities that she could not but rejoice that Stanley had chosen so well, and only hoped that their union might not be long delayed.

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## XIX.

### WILL ROSE BE THE FUTURE MISTRESS OF BRERETON?

For reasons previously explained, neither Mrs. Brereton nor Rose had seen Mr. Warburton since the commencement of his illness.

But an urgent message was now sent by him through Stanley, begging them to come to Beaucliffe; and they at once responded to the invitation, and found him looking much better than they expected.

He came down to the drawing-room, accompanied by Lady Starkey, and appeared particularly pleased to see Rose. He asked her how she liked Brereton, and when she replied "Better than any other old house she had ever seen," he said, "Strange! Mildred could not bear the place. How her dislike to it originated, I cannot imagine, but she never would pass a night there."

"I think it charming," rejoined Rose, "and shall be very sorry to leave it."

"Then why leave it?" said the squire. "Why not remain now you are there?"

Rather puzzled, Rose only replied by a slight laugh.

"I hope she will stay with us as long as she can," said Mrs. Brereton.

"When I came to Brereton with my aunt," said Rose, "I did not expect to remain so long, but great changes have taken place."

"True," replied the squire, "and may be followed by others. I should not be at all surprised if a new mistress were found for the house."

"She has not yet been announced," said Mrs. Brereton.

"Well, understand that the young lady, who has already been spoken of, is perfectly agreeable to me," said the squire.

"I have heard a rumour," said Lady Starkey; "and as I am naturally very much interested in the question, I can only hope it is true."

"Depend upon it, your ladyship shall receive early information," said Mrs. Brereton. "But at present, as I have just said, the announcement is premature."

During this talk, Rose blushed deeply, but did not utter a word.

"You must not be offended with me, dear Mrs. Brereton," said Lady Starkey. "But I hope you will satisfy my curiosity on this point. Is my niece to be the future mistress of Brereton?"

"What shall I say?" remarked Mrs. Brereton to Rose.

"Nothing," replied the young lady. "Whenever he thinks proper, Stanley will make a formal communication on the subject. Till then, silence must be observed."

"But he has given me a hint," said Lady Starkey.

"And me, too," added the squire. "Indeed, he has done more. He has consulted me on the subject, and as my opinion was favourable, there was no need of secrecy. I highly approve of the plan, and I think nothing better could be done, under the circumstances. In fact it was to tell you this that I sent for you both. The plan, I repeat, has my entire approval."

"And mine, too," said Lady Starkey, emphatically. "I have such a high opinion of my niece, that I am confident Stanley will be happy with her."

"Oh! thank you dearest aunt, for what you say," cried Rose, springing up and kissing her. "It is the greatest satisfaction to be able to speak freely of this affair, but I did not think I could do so."

"I deemed it best to come to a clear understanding," observed Mr. Warburton; "and to convince you that I am really anxious for Stanley's happiness. You must control your impatience, and wait till matters can be arranged; but rest satisfied there will be no opposition on my part."

"I never doubted it, sir," said Mrs. Brereton; "and I

only regret that you should have been placed by circumstances in such a painful position."

Just then, Stanley entered the room, and instantly perceived that a satisfactory explanation had taken place.

"I am infinitely obliged to you, sir," he said, addressing the squire. "Few fathers, who have lost a dearly-beloved daughter, would act as you have done."

"I desire to make all allowances," said Mr. Warburton. "Understand clearly that you will have no needless opposition from me; but that, so far as I can, I will assist you. And now I must bid you adieu, for, as you are aware, I am still not very strong. Come over to Beaucliffe whenever you are disposed. I shall always be glad to see you."

With this he quitted the room, attended by Lady Starkey.

"I must say I am filled with admiration and astonishment at Mr. Warburton's conduct," said Mrs. Brereton, as soon as he was gone. "I did not believe he could act thus. He seems to put himself entirely out of the question."

"He really wishes to act justly," said Stanley. "What he suffers from the terrible calamity that has befallen him, no one knows but himself. He makes no complaint. But it is certain he will never receive his daughter again."

"You think so?" said Rose.

"I am quite sure of it. Lady Starkey has extorted a promise from him to that effect, and so as Lady Talmash."

## XX.

## WHICH IS THE FAVOURITE?

MR. WARBURTON continued to improve, and might now be considered as almost well.

He no longer breakfasted in bed, or in his dressing-room, but down stairs, with Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, who kept him as cheerful as they could.

Though merely manifested in trifles, a little jealousy had sprung up between the two ladies, both of whom paid the amiable old gentleman the greatest attention, but neither could declare herself the favourite, for if one gained a step the other quickly overtook her.

The truth is the squire liked them both pretty nearly equally, though perhaps Lady Starkey had most influence with him, and occasionally he sat a quarter of an hour longer with her during breakfast than he did with Lady Talmash.

On such occasions they generally talked about Mildred, and the squire would then pour forth his griefs into her sympathising bosom.

"Now I have lost my daughter," he said, "I sometimes think I should be happier if I had a constant female companion."

"I have no doubt you would, sir," replied Lady Starkey. "You require some one to cheer you."

"I dare say your niece, who, it is to be hoped, will eventually become Stanley's wife, and who is really a most amiable person, would do her best to make me comfortable."

"But she cannot always be here," said Lady Starkey. "Stanley is quite resolved to keep up Brereton, when he marries again. I really think you cannot do better than follow his example. Be sure you will be happier and more comfortable as a husband than you have ever been as a father."

"I really begin to think so," said the squire. "But I must not marry too young a wife."

"No! no! That will never do," rejoined Lady Starkey.

"Such a choice might not lead to a happy result. You want an agreeable and lady-like companion, of middle age."

"Precisely," said the squire. "And such a one I have in my eye at the present moment."

Lady Starkey looked quite confused.

"How am I to understand you, Mr. Warburton?" she asked.

"I hope I have said nothing to offend your ladyship?" he rejoined.

"Offend me! Oh no!" she replied, in a very bland and encouraging tone. "But perhaps you will give me a little time for consideration?"

"As much as your ladyship pleases," said the squire. "I wouldn't hurry you for the world. A great deal has to be considered—age, temper, tastes, and a variety of other things. But still you know something about me."

"Quite enough to satisfy me of your worth and goodness of heart," replied Lady Starkey. "And pray believe, dear Mr. Warburton, if I hesitate, it is because——"

"Don't say another word," said the squire. "It is quite natural you should hesitate. But I will relieve you at once of the difficulty. Don't think any more of the proposition just made to you."

Before Lady Starkey could make any reply the door opened and Lady Talmash came in.

"Some other time," said Lady Starkey, rising and quitting the room.

"Why is she in such a hurry?" inquired Lady Talmash. "I seem to have come rather *mal à propos*. It almost looks as if you had been making her an offer of your hand, and had been refused—though that's very unlikely."

"Unlikely as it seems," said the squire; "it's the fact."

"Well, I couldn't have believed it," cried her ladyship, in amazement. "I wonder she could be insensible to your merits."

"I am too old for her, I suppose," said the squire, with a sigh. "It's great presumption, I own, on my part, to propose to such a fine woman."

"Well, don't despair," said Lady Talmash, with a smile. "She's not the only fine woman to be found. You can't be violently in love with her?"

"I didn't pretend to be in love with her at all," said the squire. "I only want an amiable and ladylike companion, and she rather led me to believe she would like to be mistress of Beaucliffe."

"No doubt she would," rejoined Lady Talmash. "And I'm quite astonished she should have thrown away the chance."

"Well, now, just tell me how you yourself, would behave under similar circumstances?" said the squire.

"I can't tell," she replied. "Ask a direct question and I'll give you a precise answer. You may be jesting all this time. I confess it looks like it. And judging from her otherwise inexplicable conduct, Lady Starkey seems to have entertained the same opinion."

At this juncture Lady Starkey returned.

She seemed rather put out on finding Lady Talmash still with the squire, and was by no means pleased by her exulting look.

"I have considered what you said to me just now, before I left the room, sir," she said.

"Oh! I thought that was all at an end," exclaimed the squire.

"How at end?" cried Lady Starkey, in astonishment.

"In other words, that the offer was declined," said the squire.

"No such thing," rejoined the lady. "A short time was allowed me for consideration, and I have now returned to say that I accept."

"Accept!" exclaimed the squire, in dismay. "But it's too late. I thought you had declined, and acted accordingly."

"You don't mean to say you have made another proposal since I left the room."

"Undoubtedly I have."

"And been accepted?"

"Ask Lady Talmash. She can give you the best response."

"Most certainly," said the lady appealed to. "I meant to accept him."

"You have acted most improperly, sir," said Lady Starkey angrily. "I asked for a little time for consideration, which you most readily granted, and on my returning after a few minutes' absence, during which I had determined to accept you, I find you have made a second offer. Is such conduct that of a gentleman?" she added, regarding him fixedly.

"It has been a complete misapprehension on my part," replied the squire in an apologetic tone. "I certainly thought you *had* rejected me."

"I don't see how that was possible, sir," said Lady Starkey. "But even suppose there has been a mistake, which it is difficult to imagine, you must have been in a most desperate hurry."

"I am bound to say that Mr. Warburton told me at once that he had just been refused," said Lady Talmash, who could scarcely refrain from laughing.

"I was decidedly under that impression," said the squire. "Cannot you arrange the matter between yourselves? I shall be perfectly content with either."

"Mine is the prior claim," said Lady Starkey, "and I see no reason whatever for relinquishing it."

"And most certainly I shan't give up mine," said Lady Talmash.

"Then it seems I must have two wives," groaned the squire. "Can't you offer a suggestion?" he said to Lady Starkey.

"If I did so," replied her ladyship, "I would recommend Lady Talmash to retire."

"That would be a concession I am not likely to make to your ladyship," rejoined the other. "I don't desire to praise myself, but for several months of her married life, while Mildred resided beneath her father's roof, I have managed matters for her—and, I believe, entirely to Mr. Warburton's satisfaction."

"Entirely," he repeated, "entirely."

"Then since he entertains such an opinion of me," pursued her ladyship, "is it not probable he would desire to make me his wife?"

"Not merely probable, but certain," said the squire. "I consider myself under the greatest obligation to Lady Talmash for the almost maternal kindness to my daughter, and am most anxious to repay her."

"Your ladyship hears what Mr. Warburton says?" observed Lady Talmash, sarcastically.

"Yes, but that has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Mr. Warburton ought to feel very grateful to your ladyship—and does so, no doubt—but that is no reason why he should make you an offer of marriage—especially without waiting for an answer to a previous proposal. I hold him to his word. Can he deny having given it?"

"No, no, I don't do that," replied the luckless squire. "But I really think, under the circumstances, your ladyship ought to set me free."

"I can't," she rejoined.

"Won't, you mean," he returned. "Well, then I must make another appeal to you," he said to Lady Talmash.

"I'm inexorable," she replied, shaking her head.

"What's to be done?" cried the squire. "Talk the matter over! Perhaps you may come to an amicable conclusion. I'll leave you together."

And he hurried out of the room.

Left alone, the two ladies acted upon his advice. Instead of saying sharp things to each other, they seemed disposed to hold a little friendly discourse.

"Don't be angry with me, dearest Lady Starkey, if I have inadvertently thwarted your plans," said Lady Talmash. "But I really thought from the squire's manner that you had refused him—and consequently, that you would not mind what I might do. If you really are serious, and desire to have charge of him, I'll give him up at once."

"A thousand thanks for your consideration, dearest Lady Talmash, but, perhaps, I'm happier as I am. I have a nice house in town, and a sufficient income, and with Beaucliffe to manage, and Mr. Warburton who I fear will henceforward be an invalid to look after, I might have more to do than I should like. So I won't stand in your way."

"What your ladyship says makes me feel perfectly easy," replied Lady Talmash. "A marriage with Mr. Warburton is of far more consequence to one of limited income than it can be to a person of good property like your ladyship. I shall therefore accept him."

"And apart from any consideration of fortune, you will do quite right in accepting him," replied Lady Starkey. "Mr.

Warburton is a most excellent man, and will make you a most indulgent husband. My only fear has been, that in spite of all we can say to him, he might receive Mildred back. You must take care of that."

"Depend upon it, I will," replied Lady Talmash. "And that reminds me that a few days ago Sister Aline received a communication from her, the contents of which seem to give the poor thing a good deal of uneasiness. She didn't say that anything had happened—but I almost feared so from her manner. I believe she has gone to Boulogne to make inquiries. No, she is still here, I find," she added, as the personage in question was ushered into the room by a footman.

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## XXI.

### SISTER ALINE BRINGS ILL NEWS.

SISTER ALINE raised her veil as she entered the room, and her features looked even paler than usual. From her manner it was evident that she brought ill news, and both ladies regarded her anxiously.

"Have you seen Mildred?" inquired Lady Talmash.

"Yes, I have seen her," replied the sister; "and I grieve to say circumstances have occurred that have compelled my immediate return here."

"What circumstances?" cried Lady Starkey. "Pray don't keep us in suspense! Is she still with Captain Darcy, at Boulogne?"

"No, she has left him——"

"Left him?" exclaimed both ladies.

"For ever," rejoined Sister Aline.

"What has occasioned their separation?" inquired Lady Starkey.

"A violent quarrel," replied the sister. "Very unpleasant

things, I grieve to say, have passed between them—such as will for ever prevent them from coming together again.”

“This is bad news indeed!” said Lady Talmash, glancing at Lady Starkey. “I am afraid it will kill poor Mr. Warburton.”

“I hastened to bring him the earliest intelligence of the event that he might know how to act under the painful circumstances,” said Sister Aline.

“I am of the same opinion as Lady Talmash,” said Lady Starkey. “Unless the greatest care is taken I fear the intelligence may be fatal to him.”

“As yet, I have only spoken to Stanley, whom I saw at Brereton on my way here,” said Sister Aline. “He advised the utmost caution, and his fears for Mr. Warburton are almost as great as your own.”

“Was not Stanley surprised at these unlooked-for tidings?” said Lady Starkey.

“He was almost overcome,” replied Sister Aline. “But he succeeded in maintaining his firmness. He made many inquiries about her, but I gave him no information.”

“And I suppose you intend to treat us in like manner?” remarked Lady Talmash.

“I am prohibited from answering certain questions,” said the sister.

“Nor do we desire to ask them,” said Lady Starkey; “except that on all accounts, we should wish to be satisfied that the unhappy lady will not come here.”

“At present she has no such intention,” replied Sister Aline. “Nor will she do so at any time, unless compelled by circumstances.”

“Then it must be our business to prevent her,” said Lady Starkey. “We cannot allow Mr. Warburton’s valuable life to be jeopardised by any unwarrantable intrusion on her part.”

“Ought the visit of a daughter to be described as an unwarrantable intrusion?” said Sister Aline.

“She has forfeited all right to be considered as a daughter,” said Lady Talmash. “We look upon her offences as aggravated by her subsequent conduct, and should she attempt to return, the doors will be closed against her.”

“Let her not be deceived in this respect,” added Lady

Starkey. "She will certainly be so treated. Besides, she will inflict still greater pain on her unhappy father."

"Alas! alas! have you no compassion for the penitent?" said Sister Aline, in piteous accents.

"How know we that she *is* penitent?" said Lady Starkey. "All we know is, that she left her husband with a lover, and has now quarrelled with the lover and left *him*."

"She is utterly unworthy of consideration," said Lady Talmash. "Appeal to the injured husband, if you think proper, and try to move him; but leave alone the suffering father, or if ill ensues it will rest on your own head."

At this juncture Mr. Warburton returned, and was greatly surprised by finding Sister Aline in the room.

Awed by the menacing looks of the two ladies, the sister uttered not a word.

As she continued to maintain silence, the squire began to question her.

"Have you received any tidings from Mildred?"

"I have seen her," she replied.

"Where, in Heaven's name?" he inquired.

"I am not at liberty to answer that question," she rejoined.

"But you can tell me where she is. Is she at Boulogne?"

"No."

The reluctance with which she answered convinced the squire that something was intentionally kept from him, and he was determined to have a direct answer.

"Then they have left Boulogne," he said.

"Darcy is still there, but not your daughter."

"Have they separated?" cried the squire, trembling with anxiety.

The two ladies looked at Sister Aline in the vain hope of checking her.

"You must not ask me that question, sir," she said.

"Your evasive answer satisfies me that I have guessed the truth," he cried, looking still more excited. "In pity, relieve my anxiety, and tell me precisely what has happened. Perhaps, you think I cannot bear it. But you are mistaken. I would rather know the worst than remain in this state of dreadful suspense."

"There is no occasion to distress yourself thus, sir," inter-

posed Lady Starkey. "Nothing dreadful has happened. Your daughter has committed an imprudence, no doubt—but that might be expected from her. Had it been possible, we would have kept it from your knowledge—at least, for the present."

"It seems that I am constantly destined to suffer," groaned the squire, sinking into a chair. "Can you give me any consolation?" he added to Lady Talmash.

"I would advise you to bestow no thought upon the matter," she replied. "Dwell upon it as little as you can."

"Darcy and Mildred have quarrelled and separated, so you say," cried the squire, looking at Sister Aline. "Is there aught more you have to tell?"

"Much," she replied. "But I am not allowed to tell it."

"Who prevents you?"

"Mildred herself," she rejoined, looking rather frightened.

"But I insist on knowing all," he cried, springing to his feet, and seizing her hand. "Speak out! I *will* know the truth."

"Am I free to speak?" said Sister Aline to Lady Talmash.

"Certainly," replied the other.

"Then the quarrel arose from jealousy—jealousy on the part of Mildred. A letter fell into her hands, from which she discovered that he had been unfaithful. She bitterly reproached him, but he treated her reproaches with contempt, and told her she might leave him, if she chose. 'Are you tired of me?' she asked. 'It may be so,' was his reply. 'Then you shall never behold me again,' she rejoined. And she left him with the fixed determination of carrying out her threat."

"Alas!" ejaculated the squire. "Has it come to this? So soon! so soon!"

"Nothing else could be expected," said Lady Talmash. "In my opinion, Darcy did not really love her—though she believed so. He had boasted that he would take her away from her husband, and he kept his word. Every art familiar to one so unscrupulous was employed to accomplish his purpose."

"Again, I feel how greatly I have been to blame for exposing her to him!" ejaculated the squire.

"Do not torture yourself with these needless self-reproaches

sir," said Lady Talmash. "Nothing you could have done would have saved her."

"There you are wrong," rejoined Sister Aline. "Her father was the only person who could have saved her, but he shut his eyes to the danger."

"I did not discern it," exclaimed the squire. "I had perfect faith in my daughter. Even when you cautioned me, I could not believe her capable of any imprudence."

"Do not make any further mistake," said Lady Starkey. "Your firmness may again be severely tried."

"Then I must pray you to give me your support," cried the unhappy father. "What shall I do if she appeals to me to receive her?"

"Unhesitatingly reject her," said Lady Starkey.

"Oh! no, no, no!" implored Sister Aline. "Reject her not. Save her from further danger."

"If I thought I *could* save her I would not hesitate," exclaimed the squire.

"You will make a greater mistake than any you have yet committed if you take her back," said Lady Talmash in a warning voice. "Shut your heart against her. She does not deserve pity."

"Heed not what others say—be guided by your better feelings, sir," said Sister Aline. "Your heart prompts you to take her back. Obey its impulses!"

The poor squire made an ineffectual attempt to reply, but fell back in his chair, half suffocated by emotion.

By the time he had recovered, Stanley had arrived, and assisted to take him to his own room.

Sister Aline had to sustain some angry remarks from the two ladies for her imprudence. But she bore their reproaches very meekly.

"I will never believe," she said, "that worthy Mr. Warburton will act unkindly."

## XXII.

## WHAT FOLLOWED MILDRED'S RETURN.

PLACING the squire in an easy-chair, and making him as comfortable as he could, Stanley left him to repose, thinking he might only excite him further, if he stopped to talk with him.

By-and-by the two ladies came into the room, but finding the old gentleman asleep, did not disturb him.

On awakening from a long slumber, which had completely calmed his nerves, what was the worthy gentleman's astonishment, and indeed dismay, to find a young lady watching beside him.

Could it be Mildred?

At first, he thought he must be dreaming, and doubted the evidence of his senses, but he soon became convinced it was really his daughter, and spoke to her in accents meant to be severe, but which, in reality, were tender and paternal.

"How is it I find you here?" he demanded.

By way of reply, she flung herself down before him, and embraced his knees.

He strove to maintain a stern demeanour, and thrust her back, but did not succeed.

Looking up with streaming eyes, and clasped hands, she implored his forgiveness.

The poor squire tried to avert his gaze, and shut his ears—but in vain. His quivering lips and trembling limbs betrayed his emotion.

"You ought not to have come here without permission," he said, "and permission would not have been granted you."

"I know it," she replied, in penitential tones. "But do not drive me hence till you have heard what I have to say. Ever since I left my dearest father with the perfidious wretch

who induced me to fly with him, I have been miserable ; and I rejoice at the rupture between us. In venturing to come back to my old home I presume upon my dearest father's former love for me, which I feel sure cannot be entirely extinguished. I seek no reunion with Stanley. I know it is impossible—nor do I desire it. It would be a life of ceaseless upbraiding and reproach, which I ought to bear, but could not."

"I am sure you could not," said Mr. Warburton.

"What I would do were I so permitted," she continued, "would be to return privately to this house, and dwell here in perfect seclusion—unseen and unknown by the world."

"Nonsense," replied Mr. Warburton. "You would soon be tired of such a life, and would fly from me, as you have just flown from Darcy."

"Fear it not," she rejoined, earnestly. "I would never leave you again."

"So you persuade yourself now," rejoined her father, sadly. "But I know better. Apart, however, from all other considerations, such a scheme is utterly impracticable."

"Not so, dearest papa," she replied, rising from her kneeling posture, and taking the seat beside him. "I need not remind you that at the end of the east wing of the mansion, there are three or four rooms which are rarely occupied ; I could go there."

"But your presence would necessarily be known to the servants, if not to others," said Mr. Warburton, whose changed manner showed that his daughter's proposition had produced an effect on him.

"That will not matter if I do not appear," she rejoined. "I shall have Charlotte and another servant to attend on me. I am quite aware that Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash are staying here, and I know they are both very inquisitive. But they won't interfere with me unless I interfere with them ; and as I shall carefully keep out of their way, I am not afraid."

"But there is Stanley !"

"You must tell him the truth, and if he objects to my presence—though he will never see me—you must persuade him to go to Brereton."

"Well, I don't know what to say," rejoined the squire, evi-

dently yielding. "I don't like to refuse you; but if I accede to the proposition, I am afraid I shall be very much blamed."

"Never mind, dearest papa, you will be acting most kindly."

The squire reflected for a few minutes, and then said:

"Give me your solemn promise that you will remain perfectly quiet, and never interfere in any way with Stanley."

"I give you my promise to that effect," she replied. "I don't think you will object to another request I have to make. I should like Sister Aline to have one of the rooms next me."

"I see no objection to that arrangement," said Mr. Warburton. "On the contrary, it seems advisable."

"Then I may understand that you consent to my return in this way, dearest papa?"

"I only consent on the conditions mentioned," replied the squire.

"And to which I unhesitatingly agree," she replied. "You are the kindest father in the world," she added, kissing his hand.

"The weakest, I fear, would be nearer the truth," he rejoined.

"May I go and take possession of my room?" she asked.

"Whenever you please," he replied. "But be cautious."

"I hope you won't think I have presumed too much on your kindness, when I tell you that before coming here I ordered Charlotte to wait for me at the further end of the gallery in the east wing."

"I will see you safely there," said the squire. "But stay! before we set out, let us make certain that the coast is clear."

Opening the chamber door, he looked out, but instantly drew back.

"Get behind those curtains—quick!" he cried. "Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash are coming here. They mustn't find you."

Mildred instantly disappeared, and the two ladies after tapping at the door, entered the room.

"We have been rather uneasy about you, dear Mr. Warburton," said Lady Starkey.

"I am better," he replied. "I have had a couple of hours' sleep. But I don't feel equal to much talk."

"Would you rather we didn't stop?" asked Lady Talmash.

"Oh! no, no," cried the squire. "Ten minutes can do no harm. Pray sit down!"

"We've brought you some news that will surprise you," said Lady Starkey. "What do you think? There's a report below that your daughter has returned. I sincerely hope it's not true. Nothing more vexatious could happen. You would find it very difficult to get rid of her, but she mustn't stay here."

"She mustn't even enter the house," cried Lady Talmash. "You know my opinion on that point, and it's wholly unchanged. I scarcely think she will dare to show herself; but should she come, leave me to deal with her."

"How has the report originated, I wonder?" asked the squire.

"Some of the servants declare they have seen her," said Lady Talmash. "But I think it must be a mistake."

"I sincerely hope so," said Lady Starkey. "We shall escape a vast deal of unpleasantness."

"Well, dear ladies, I'm afraid I shan't be able to bear much more of this sort of talk," said the squire. "So if you are good enough to stay with me, I must beg of you to change the topic."

"Before doing so," said Lady Starkey, "let us know whether you wish any inquiries made as to the truth of the report?"

"No, no; let it rest," cried the squire.

But this seemed impossible, for just then Stanley made his appearance, and it was easy to perceive from his excited manner that he had heard the rumour and wanted to be satisfied about it.

Mr. Warburton regarded him with uneasiness—almost with terror,

"Is Mildred really come back?" cried Stanley. "I can't believe it."

"Ask the ladies," said the squire; "they have just brought me the tidings."

"We have been forbidden to say anything more on the subject," they both remarked.

"I'm sorry to disobey the orders," said Stanley, "but per-

naps I may be excused under the circumstances. The report seems scarcely credible, still it may be true."

"May we speak?" cried the ladies.

"Say as little as you can," replied the squire, reluctantly.

"How has the report originated?" asked Stanley. "Surely it must have some foundation?"

"We cannot trace it to any other source more trustworthy than servants' talk," said Lady Talmash.

"Then most likely it's mere invention," rejoined Stanley, "and I shall attach no importance to it. But should it unhappily prove true, I shall be much grieved on your account, sir. For myself it won't matter, as I shall never exchange another word with her under any circumstances, and shall try to avoid her."

"I quite approve of your determination," said Mr. Warburton. "Act up to it, but I don't think she will trouble you. She shan't; if I can prevent her."

"That's as much as I can expect," rejoined Stanley.

And he marched out of the room, to the squire's great relief.

"Shall we see you at dinner, sir?" said the ladies, as they prepared to follow.

"Yes, if you promise not to torment me with any more of these silly stories," said the squire.

"Make yourself quite easy, sir," said Lady Starkey. "You shall hear nothing disagreeable, depend upon it."

As soon as they had taken their departure, Mildred came out from her hiding-place, looking flushed with anger.

"I hate them both," she exclaimed. "I longed to tell them what I think of them."

"Let us go to your room without delay, or some fresh hindrance may occur," said the squire.

And looking cautiously forth, he called out:

"All right! Come on!"

Mildred promptly obeyed, and they walked quickly on till they came to a long gallery on the right, down which they hastened.

At the further end of this gallery stood a young female servant.

"There's Charlotte at her post," cried Mildred.

"Yes, I see her," replied the squire.

Charlotte had likewise perceived them, but did not quit her station.

As they approached she opened the door of a very pretty bedroom, completely furnished in the French style. The window commanded a charming view of the garden.

"I've always thought I should like to have this room," said Mildred; "and now I've got my wish. I'm sure I shall be happy here."

"I hope and trust you may," rejoined the squire. "But you must not raise your expectations too high. The room looks very pleasant and cheerful, but you may find it dull."

"Sister Aline has the next room," said Charlotte. "Mine's the third."

"Go to it, then, for a few minutes," said Mildred.

And as the attendant departed she remarked to her father:

"I sent her away because I want to thank you again for your great kindness. Never shall I forget it, never!"

Mr. Warburton looked at her tenderly for a few minutes, and then said in his old affectionate manner:

"Whatever you want you shall have. Always send Charlotte to me when you have a request to make. It will never be refused."

"Thank you! thank you, dearest papa!" she cried, throwing her arms round his neck and kissing him affectionately.

"Come and see me every day!" she implored, "if only for a couple of minutes. Promise me that!"

Looking far more cheerful than he had done for some time, her father gave the required promise.

## XXIII.

## THE DIVORCE IS ABANDONED.

It cannot be supposed that Mildred's return to Beacliffe could be long kept secret; but by Mr. Warburton's wish no allusion whatever was made to it.

For nearly a week she remained a close prisoner in her room, and saw no one except her father and Sister Aline.

A great change had taken place in her character. Since her return, she had become exceedingly penitent and devout—was constantly engaged in prayer—and read only religious books. Her father was by no means displeased by the change, which he justly attributed to the earnest exhortations of Sister Aline.

He thought her penitence carried too far, and occasionally remonstrated with her on the long fasting she practised, but he did not absolutely prohibit it, as he thought it might prove beneficial in the end.

She had now become as strict in the private observance of her religious duties, as she had formerly been careless of them. Her great regret was that she could not attend church service, but this was impossible under present circumstances.

Sister Aline consoled her, by the assurance that after a certain amount of probation, she might devote herself entirely to Heaven.

The altered mode of life she had now adopted, the fasting and discipline she practised, had already affected her health and threatened seriously to injure it if continued. But though her father pointed this out to her, and she herself was conscious of it, she persisted in the same course.

Her beauty was as great as ever—but wholly different from what it had been—it was delicate, ethereal, almost saintly. So much touched was her father by her expression that he

could scarcely regard her without tears springing to his eyes.

But if no one else admired the change wrought in her character, Sister Aline did. Not improperly did she regard herself as the author of the good work; and though she perceived the danger to her friend's health, she would not desist from the task. "What matters it, if her soul be saved?" she thought.

When Mildred first took possession of the room she now occupied, she persuaded herself that she should spend a great deal of time in the garden, which could be easily reached by a back staircase. But such was not the case. She rarely left her own chamber, except for that of Sister Aline.

Then commenced their devotions, which were of long continuance, and occupied the whole of their time. Mr. Warburton could scarcely believe it when he heard what they went through though he was a frequent witness of their penitential practices.

One fine morning, the garden looked so delightful, that Mildred could not resist the temptation of taking a walk within it.

"How say you, sister?" she remarked. "Shall we spend an hour among the trees?"

Sister Aline expressed her assent, upon which they went down the back staircase to the garden.

They were proceeding slowly along a retired walk, when Stanley suddenly came forth from an alley on the left. He started on beholding Mildred, but scarcely seemed surprised to meet her—proving that he must know she was in the house.

With but a cold salute he would have passed, but she seized hold of his hand, and held him so forcibly, that he could not tear himself away.

"Pray stop with me a moment," she said. "I will not detain you long."

He yielded to her request, but with a bad grace, and looked very stern. "What have you to say?" he demanded.

"Have you any pity for me?" she asked. "Can you forgive me?"

"All your entreaties will fail to move me," he rejoined. "You have sinned too deeply to be forgiven."

"Not so," rejoined Sister Aline. "I can testify to her deep and sincere repentance. Dismiss her not thus harshly."

"She has acted so badly, and given me so much pain, that I cannot forgive her," said Stanley. "I hope never to meet her again—nor should I have done so now, if she had not placed herself in my path."

"It will cost you nothing more than a slight effort to pardon her," said Sister Aline; "and it will give her unspeakable relief. Be merciful! be merciful!"

"Say rather, 'Be not cruel!'" added Mildred.

"I do not desire to be cruel," said Stanley, "but how can you expect pity from me—you, who have never shown the slightest consideration for my feelings? Do not detain me longer! Let me pass!"

"Go, then," rejoined Mildred, stepping aside. "But hereafter you will regret your conduct."

"I have just said that I do not wish to be cruel," said Stanley; "and if you really are penitent, I forgive you—not for your own sake—but for your father's."

And he marched away, without once looking back.

"I thought he had more generosity in his nature," said Mildred. "Let us go back and pray that his heart may be turned."

On quitting Mildred and her companion, Stanley proceeded to the front of the house, where he found a little party, consisting of Lady Starkey, Lady Talmash, Mrs. Brereton, and Rose, playing lawn-tennis. The two latter had just come over from Brereton.

Mr. Warburton was looking on, but took no part in the game. When Stanley drew near he went to meet him.

"I wish you could see Mildred," he said. "I am very uneasy about her. She looks extremely ill."

"I have just accidentally met her in the back part of the garden," replied Stanley; "and I was really quite shocked by her altered appearance. I should be sorry to alarm you, but I confess I don't think she will live long."

"Such is my own opinion," said Mr. Warburton. "I have watched her carefully of late, and have come to that conclusion. She refuses medical advice. Under these circumstances I would appeal to you not to proceed with your divorce. It will give me great pain, and she will not long trouble you."

"Since you make this touching appeal to me, sir, I cannot refuse," replied Stanley. "You need fear nothing more. I will write at once to stop all proceedings."

"Thank you, thank you!" said the squire, earnestly. "You won't regret your generosity. I shan't forget it."

"Darcy shan't escape," said Stanley, sternly. "I'm determined to punish him!"

"Leave him for the present," rejoined Mr. Warburton. "We shall see how all goes on here."

"Is it your wish, sir, that I should leave Brereton?"

"I think you had better stay here for the present," replied Mr. Warburton.

"Your wishes shall be obeyed, sir," replied Stanley. "As far as I am concerned I would rather remain here, and poor Mildred does not interfere with me in the slightest degree."

"Stanley," said the squire, with an imploring look, "I hope you will forgive her. It will console her greatly, and I am sure she is sincerely penitent. I must go and tell her that you have promised to abandon the divorce. I am sure it will be a great relief to her."

"Tell her, also, that I sincerely forgive her," said Stanley.

"Depend upon it, I will," replied the squire.

And he hastened towards the back staircase, with the intention of going to Mildred's room.

Mr. Warburton was struck by his daughter's sorrowful looks as he entered.

"I am afraid you are worse to-day," he said.

"No," she replied. "But I have just seen Stanley, who did not behave kindly to me."

"He has made amends for what he said to you; so pray think no more of it. You will be pleased to hear that he has agreed to abandon the divorce; so you need have no future anxiety about it."

"That is a great satisfaction to me," she replied, "and I am sure it will make you much easier."

"He also desired me to say that he sincerely forgives you the wrong you have done him."

"He refused me pardon when I met him in the garden; but since he has now granted it I am content. I can now die in peace."

"And now, my dear child," said the squire, "having fulfilled all I come to do, I shall take my departure. I do not think you will see me again before the morning, when, perhaps, I may have some news for you."

"I care little for news now, papa," she said; "and never look at a newspaper. I am now going into Sister Aline's room, and shall remain engaged in prayer with her for two or three hours. I shall then return to read, and shall not lay aside my book till midnight."

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## XXIV.

### DARCY REAPPEARS.

MILDRED and Sister Aline continued their devotions for full three hours; they next conversed for some time on religious topics; and then separated for the night.

On entering her own room, Mildred glanced around, not with the expectation of any discovery, but from habit, and the chance that something might have been left during her absence.

The room seemed entirely undisturbed. No one was in attendance, for Charlotte had retired to rest. Mildred took a taper and sat down beside a small table.

She had not been there many minutes, when she heard a noise for which she could not account.

Raising her eyes, she perceived a tall personage, who had issued from some corner of the room, and now stood before her.

The person she beheld was Darcy. But how, or why he came there—except to annoy her—she could not conceive.

Never, since their separation, had she heard from him in any way. Why should he appear now? How did he know where she was lodged? How had he obtained admittance to the house?

For a few moments he did not speak, so she had plenty of time for reflection.

"Why have you come here to trouble me?" she asked. "I hoped we should never meet again."

"We parted in anger," he said. "I wished that we should have a few words together in peace and friendship. As I could not meet you elsewhere, I came here."

"Be brief in what you have to say," she rejoined. "When we parted at Boulogne, you hoped never to behold me again, and I certainly never expected to see you. You have no right whatever to come here—to my father's house. But I will pardon the intrusion—though not a second time. Now, what is it you have to say?"

"Have you no look of love for me?" he asked.

"I never had any love for you; but I now detest you, and regard you as my worst enemy," she rejoined.

"You once loved me sufficiently to fly with me from your husband," he said.

"That was madness, not love," she rejoined.

"Listen to me for a few minutes," said Darcy. "Though we have begun very badly, we may get on better. I am sure you would be happier with me than you can possibly be here. I am as much in love with you as I was at first. Ever since you left me I have been longing to have you back. Will you fly with me a second time as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements?"

"I will sooner die," replied Mildred, in a determined tone. "Nor will I allow you to insult me by such a proposition. I have quitted you for ever, as I told you at the time, and nothing shall induce me to return. So pray depart quietly, and if you do so I will endeavour to forgive the intrusion."

"Think the matter over," rejoined Darcy. "I will come again to-morrow evening at the same hour. Very probably you may have changed your mind."

"Be not deceived," she said. "Short as the time is since I left you, I am no longer the same. I desire to pass the brief remainder of my days in penitence and prayer. I seek to efface my sins—not to add to their number."

"I could not have believed in such a change, had I not seen it," said Darcy. "But this must be Sister Aline's work."

"Yes, she has saved me," replied Mildred. "Without her I should have been lost."

Just then the door opened, and Sister Aline came in.

She started on beholding Darcy, and a shudder passed over her frame.

"Darcy here!" she exclaimed. "The man of all others I most dread and dislike."

"He has been trying to persuade me to fly with him again," said Mildred. "But he has received no encouragement from me, and I trust he will never intrude upon me again."

"Were I you, I would summon the household, and arrest him or drive him forth, be the consequences what they may," said Sister Aline.

"Should he present himself again, no consideration shall be shown him," said Mildred. "Nor should he escape now, if I did not fear for my father."

"I have been quite willing to withdraw," said Darcy, "and if any alarm is caused in the house it will not be my fault. I now bid you farewell for ever," he said, addressing Mildred. "The reception you have given me is such that I shall never present myself before you under any circumstances."

"So much the better," said Sister Aline. "That is what we both desire. Now, listen to me, Captain Darcy. Should Mildred's health, which has not been good of late, become dangerously affected, this shall form no excuse for another visit from you."

"It shall not," he replied. "But I did not know she was suffering."

"She has been suffering in health ever since she left Boulogne."

"I am sorry to hear it," replied Darcy. "But I repeat she shall have no further annoyance of any kind from me. Farewell."

"I am glad he has gone," said Mildred. "I wonder how he came here. I do not think Charlotte would have admitted him into the house."

"Oh! no. I'll answer for her," replied Sister Aline.

"Let us go and speak to her."

So they went to her room, and told her what had oc-

curred. Mildred's doubts were quickly dispelled by her manner.

On quitting the room into which he had ventured, Darcy descended the back staircase, and issued forth into the garden. But he had not taken many steps when two persons, who appeared to be on the look-out for him, came up.

It was a bright moonlight night, and he could easily perceive that the foremost of these persons was Stanley. The other seemed a man-servant—but he did not remain, and ran towards the house.

"Hold! sir," cried Stanley, planting himself before Darcy, "I cannot allow you to pass till you have explained your business here."

"Since you are attended by the very person who enabled me to enter the house, and conducted me to a certain room, you cannot require to be told what business brought me here. I came to see a certain lady. I have seen her—seen her for the last time—of that I give you my word. Now, will you allow me to pass?"

"No," replied Stanley. "I have not done with you; I must learn the business that brought you here before I allow you to depart. Did you come by the lady's sanction? By her invitation?"

"I cannot say that I did," replied Darcy. "I wished to ascertain her feelings on certain points—in a word, I wished to learn from her own lips whether she was willing to return to me."

"Ah! you come to make that inquiry?" cried Stanley, scarcely able to repress his rage.

"The passion I felt for her at first had revived in full force," replied Darcy, "and I would willingly have taken her again, if she would have returned to me. But you may be pleased to learn that she resolutely refused to accede to my wishes, and expressed her deep remorse and regret at the past. During the latter part of our brief interview, Sister Aline was present. We parted with the fixed determination never to meet again. Are you satisfied with my explanation?"

"I do not doubt its accuracy," replied Stanley, haughtily. "But I have no remark to make upon it."

"Mildred and I have now parted for ever," said Darcy. "I shall never pay her another secret visit. I find she has

become a devotee—though I should never have anticipated it, and should be sorry to interfere with her soul's welfare. Can I give any further explanation, sir?"

"I require none," replied Stanley. "But I have not yet done. I have an account to arrange with you."

"When you please, sir," replied Darcy! "I am always ready to settle it."

"Where shall we meet?" said Stanley.

"We cannot meet safely in England," replied the other. "I propose, therefore, that the encounter shall take place at Boulogne or Dieppe."

"I have a recollection connected with the latter place that recommends it to me," said Stanley.

"Then Dieppe be it," replied Darcy. "We will meet there a week hence, if it suits you?"

"It suits me perfectly," replied Stanley. "I will come the day before, and bring a couple of friends with me. Stay, I may perhaps meet my uncle's friend, the Comte de Clairvaux."

"You will be sure to hear of him at the Hôtel Royal or the Casino," said Darcy.

"No, I will not trust to chance," said Stanley; "I will bring another friend with me."

"As you please," replied Darcy.

At this juncture a sound was heard at the front of the house, proving that the alarm had been given, and the next moment several persons were seen coming round the corner.

Foremost amongst these was Mr. Warburton, and with him were Lady Starkey, Lady Talmash, Mrs. Stanley, and Rose.

At the same time another party, consisting chiefly of servants, could be seen coming from the back of the premises.

As it was clear that Darcy would be stopped if he attempted flight, he remained stationary.

In another moment the squire came up, and was immediately followed by the ladies.

"So I find you really are here, Captain Darcy," said Mr. Warburton. "I could scarcely believe the statement when I first heard it. I could not conceive it possible that you would make such an attempt."

"I am very sorry to have caused you any alarm, Mr. Warburton," said Darcy; "but I really did not mean it. Mr. Stanley Brereton will explain matters to you."

"Yes, yes, Captain Darcy has told me all, and you shall hear it presently," replied Stanley. "Meanwhile," he added in a lower tone, "I think you had better not detain him."

"Oh! if you are satisfied, I have nothing to say," remarked the squire.

"But what is the meaning of this clandestine visit?" cried Lady Starkey. "Surely we are entitled to some information!"

"Everything is known to Mr Stanley Brereton," replied Darcy. "He can tell you all."

"If he will give us a promise to that effect, we shall be quite satisfied," said Lady Talmash.

"I will, I will," replied Stanley. "Pray do not detain Captain Darcy."

"You are quite free to depart, sir," said the squire to Darcy. "I don't know what has happened——"

"But I am sure you will be satisfied with the explanation you will receive."

"Yes, you need have no uneasiness," said Stanley. "All is now arranged."

On this assurance, Darcy bowed to those near him, and quickly took his departure.

## XXV.

## THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN STANLEY AND MILDRED.

MILDRED did not suffer so much as might have been anticipated from the excitement of Darcy's visit.

Not till next morning did she learn that a meeting had taken place between him and Stanley; nor did she hear what passed at it till her father came to see her.

But the cautious squire did not tell her that a duel would ensue. Stanley felt bound to inform Mr. Warburton of his intentions but no one else, except his mother—and he almost regretted taking her into his confidence, for she could scarcely conceal her uneasiness.

Naturally, Darcy's visit excited a great sensation at Beaucliffe. That he would come again none of the servants seemed to doubt. Each night they expected a fresh alarm. But nothing occurred.

As Stanley looked upon the duel in which he had engaged with Darcy, as a mortal combat, and felt confident that his antagonist would try to shoot him, he deemed it right to make all needful arrangements in case of his own death.

Accordingly, he left all his property to his mother, to whom he gave certain directions, and having mentioned the matter to her, he felt quite easy.

He had a good deal of confidential conversation with Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, and though no allusion was made to the duel, it was evident they suspected his design. Perhaps the squire might have given them a hint.

On the fourth morning after Darcy's secret visit, as Stanley was sitting at a writing-table in the library at Beaucliffe occupied by the draft of the will, which had just been sent in by his solicitor, Sister Aline entered the room.

Without any ceremony, she took a seat on the opposite side

of the table, and, looking at him inquiringly for a moment, said :

"I see that you are reading—your will. And I know why you have just made it. You are about to fight a duel with Darcy, and wish to be prepared."

Stanley looked for a moment surprised, and then replied calmly :

"You have guessed aright; but I beg you will say nothing either about the will or the duel."

"I will not," she replied. "But, after your meeting with Darcy, everybody felt certain that a duel would ensue, and, as he is considered a dead shot, you are quite right to be prepared."

"He has a bad cause," rejoined Stanley;—"a doubly bad cause. I hope to avenge my uncle Sir Thomas Starkey's death, and my own dishonour."

"I trust you may," she rejoined, scarcely able to conceal her emotion. "Believing that this duel was inevitable, I have come to entreat you to see Mildred before you engage in it. She earnestly prays to see you."

"I cannot refuse her request. I will come to her this evening. But our meeting must be very brief."

"I will tell her what you say," replied Sister Aline. "May I venture to inquire where the duel will take place?"

"At Dieppe," he replied, significantly.

"At Dieppe," she ejaculated, starting. "Fate then may have arranged it."

"Fate, I doubt not, has ordained his chastisement," rejoined Stanley, sternly. "I do not hesitate to declare to you, who are acquainted with Darcy's history, that I will avenge Sir Thomas Starkey—if I can."

"I applaud your resolution," she rejoined. "Darcy deserves no pity."

"And shall have none," rejoined Stanley. "Either he shall kill me or I will kill him, for it will be a duel to the death."

"Heaven will guard you," she rejoined. "Your cause is the right."

"That I feel," he replied. "And I have, therefore, no uneasiness."

Sister Aline then arose.

"I shall tell Mildred you will come to her this evening," she said.

"Be present at our interview, I pray you?" he said.

"Since you desire it I will," she replied, as she quitted the room.

Not without considerable misgiving did Stanley proceed to Mildred's room that evening.

Charlotte opened the door for him, and the penitent, who had Sister Aline with her, as had been previously arranged, arose on his entrance, and received him with a faint smile.

"It is very good of you to come to me," she said, motioning him to take a seat.

Though he felt deeply for her, Stanley preserved a stern demeanour.

"Since it may be our last earthly meeting," he replied, "I could not refuse your request."

"I am very, very sorry you are obliged to meet Darcy in mortal combat," she said. "But there is no possibility of arrangement, I suppose?"

"None," replied Stanley, in a decided tone.

"Your adversary is accounted a dead shot."

"I care not," he rejoined. "He whose cause is just need have no fear. I have none."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mildred. "Still I wish you were not obliged to meet him."

"It is useless to discuss that point," said Stanley, in a stern tone. "The meeting is fixed, and under no circumstances will be changed."

"My prayers will be entirely for you," said Mildred.

"You have suffered deep wrong," said Sister Aline, addressing Stanley, "and the Lord will assuredly avenge you."

"I place my trust in Heaven," he rejoined. "If I fall punishment will overtake him."

"Do you absolutely refuse him forgiveness?" said Mildred.

"Absolutely," he replied. "But do not delude yourself with any such notion. There will be no contrition on Darcy's part."

"I fear not," said Mildred; "and I cannot doubt that the affair will have a tragic and terrible end. Unquestionably you are in the position of the avenger, and as your cause is just I cannot doubt that Heaven will strengthen your arm."

Go forth, then, without fear, for though your adversary is the more skilful he will not have the same protection as yourself."

"He is doomed," said Sister Aline; "and what is more, deserves his fate.

"I will not spare him, depend upon it!" said Stanley, rising to depart. "Farewell!"

He did not hazard a glance at Mildred as he quitted the room, and, consequently, did not perceive that she had fainted.

The interview had been very painful to him and he was glad it was over.

Restoratives were immediately applied by Sister Aline and Charlotte, who was summoned to her assistance, and Mildred soon regained consciousness. But it was evident that she was severely shaken, and Sister Aline remained with her during the whole of a sleepless night.

Next day, she was not much better, but was soothed by converse with her father, who spent an hour by her couch.

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## XXVI.

### PREPARATIONS FOR THE DUEL.

ACCOMPANIED by two friends, Mr. Wynn and Mr. Linton who joined him in town, Stanley crossed from Newhaven to Dieppe; to keep his appointment with Darcy. He had allowed himself plenty of time, for the meeting was not to take place till the second day after his arrival. He took his friends with him to the Hôtel Royal, where he had previously engaged rooms, and was much pleased to learn from inquiries made immediately on his arrival, that the Comte de Clairvaux was in Dieppe at the time,—so he went immediately in quest of him, and found him at the Casino.

The comte was much pleased to see him, and declared he should be happy to serve him in any way in his power.

On hearing that Stanley's object was to fight a duel with Darcy, he could not help expressing a hope that the young man might prove victorious.

"I had the greatest regard for your uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey, and have always felt that his death ought to be avenged. It gives me, therefore, the greatest satisfaction to feel that you have called Captain Darcy to account, and I will most readily act for you in any way you may desire, but since you are already provided with seconds, you will only require me as a friend, and I shall be most happy to act in that capacity, and, perhaps, I may be of use."

"You will be of the greatest use, Monsieur le Comte," replied Stanley, "and I shall be exceedingly obliged by your assistance."

"Very likely you are not aware that Captain Darcy and his friends, Colonel Seymour and Captain Townley, have arrived, and are staying at the same hotel as yourself. Of course, until now, I was not aware of the object of their visit, though I rather suspected it."

"Allow me to mention, comte," said Stanley, "that I should like the meeting to take place on the exact spot where the former fatal duel occurred."

"There can be no difficulty about that," replied the comte. "I know the precise place where my dear friend fell, and I never pass near it without thinking of him with a sigh. It is near the road to the Château d'Arques, and is marked out by an old oak. But I will find the coachman who drove Sir Thomas on that occasion, and engage him, so there shall be no mistake."

"I shall be greatly beholden to you," said Stanley. "I attach great importance to this slight circumstance."

"I don't think the circumstance is slight," replied the comte. "It will inspire you with thoughts proper to the occasion. Shall I engage Monsieur Martin, the surgeon who attended dear Sir Thomas at the former duel? I saw him yesterday."

"Engage him by all means, comte," replied Stanley.

"I trust you won't require his services," said the comte. "But it is proper to have a surgeon with you."

The foregoing conversation took place in front of the Hôtel Royal, and just at its close Darcy and his two friends made their appearance.

Colonel Seymour and Captain Townley were both tall and handsome, with a decidedly military bearing; and Darcy having pointed out Stanley to them, they formally saluted him as they passed.

Darcy did not enter the hotel with his friends, but signified that he should be glad to say a word to the *compte*, whereupon Stanley left them together.

"I fancy you have something to communicate to me, *Monsieur le Compte*," said Darcy. "Is it so?"

"I have merely to mention that the meeting between you and Mr. Stanley Brereton is to take place on the exact spot where the former duel occurred, on the day after to-morrow."

"At what hour?" asked Darcy.

"At eight in the morning, if that is not too early for you," replied the *compte*.

"The hour will suit me perfectly," replied Darcy.

"Will you lead the way to the place of rendezvous?"

"Certainly, if you desire it," replied Darcy.

"Then all is settled—so far as I can see," said the *compte*.

They then saluted each other ceremoniously, and separated.

On that day, all the persons who were so soon to meet in deadly conflict dined at the Casino, and in the public room, but at tables placed far apart.

As will naturally be expected, the *Compte de Clairvaux* dined with Stanley and his friends.

Both parties were very lively, and no one would have supposed from their manner that the principals had a mortal duel on hand.

Next morning Darcy walked forth at an early hour, and took his way down to the *plage*.

He had not gone far, when he heard quick steps behind him, and looking back, saw that he was followed by Sister Aline.

As it was impossible to avoid her, he stopped, and regarded her with a stern look.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" he said.

"I do," she replied. "I have come to bid you prepare. Your evil career is near its close."

"Do not suppose that your threats have the slightest effect upon me," he replied. "I am not to be frightened. If you desire to save Stanley Brereton, warn him, for I swear to Heaven if he places himself opposite me on Friday morning I will shoot him as I did his uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey."

"You persuade yourself so," she rejoined, "But you are mistaken. Stanley is destined to kill you, and his bullet will as surely be lodged in your breast as you now stand before me."

Darcy laughed scornfully.

"You try vainly to alarm me," he said. "If he keeps to his appointment, as no doubt he will, for he is a brave man, nothing can save him."

"Indulge no false expectations," she rejoined. "Heaven will frustrate your design. Your wicked career is nearly ended. If you would not perish eternally, make you peace quickly above."

"I will listen no more to this frenzy," he said. "Let me pass!"

And he pushed her aside.

But as he cast a look behind, he trembled at her vindictive looks.

"That woman troubles me," he thought. "What can have brought her here?"

For a few moments his strong nerves were shaken, and he regarded the approaching meeting with dread. But this feeling passed off quickly, and he laughed at his own fears.

"This is superstitious folly," he mentally ejaculated. "Because this crazy woman has unexpectedly appeared on the scene, and threatened me, am I to be made uneasy? That would be to confess myself as weak as herself. No, let me keep my nerves firmly strung. Let me be prepared to act, as I did when I encountered Sir Thomas Starkey, and in a very few minutes Stanley will be lying at my feet, never to rise again. But if I give way to idle fears, my hand will shake when it should be steady, and I shall certainly miss my aim."

## XXVII.

## STANLEY'S MESSAGE TO MILDRED.

DEEMING it desirable to familiarise himself with the ground, Stanley, accompanied by his two friends and the Comte de Clairvaux, drove over, in the course of the day, to the place of meeting. He had engaged an open carriage, and was driven by Sir Thomas Starkey's coachman and attended by the comte's valet, Pierre.

As the morning was very fine, they all enjoyed the drive. They alighted near the old oak, and after carefully examining the ground, which Stanley regarded with deep interest, they ascended the mound which, it may be remembered, stood near the spot.

On the further side of this eminence they perceived a female figure, which Stanley and the comte at once recognised as Sister Aline, and they went to speak to her.

"I did not expect to find you here," said Stanley; "but I suppose you could not help coming."

"I have been praying for you," she replied; "and I am persuaded you will be successful to-morrow. Your cause is as good as your adversary's is bad."

"Mr. Brereton has got a dangerous antagonist," remarked the comte. "But if he will follow my advice he has nothing to fear. Aim high, and fire quick."

"It is my intention to fire as quickly as I can," said Stanley.

"Have your friends ever acted as seconds in a duel before?" asked the count.

"I think not," replied Stanley. "But I have no doubt they will carry me through satisfactorily."

"A great deal depends upon experience," said the count. "I must give them a few hints. With regard to yourself—If your hand is perfectly steady, raise your pistol as quickly as

you can, and since your purpose is to kill, fire when you gain the region of the heart. A second will make all the difference—remember that. In the former duel, it was promptitude that gave Darcy success.”

“I fancied so,” replied Stanley; “and I therefore resolved to be quick—and I have perfect reliance on myself.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” replied the count. “And now, excuse me for a few minutes, while I have a little talk with those gentlemen. I can see they are unaccustomed to these matters.”

So saying, he went to the seconds, and explained some details to them, with which he felt sure they were unacquainted.

Meanwhile, Stanley remained with Sister Aline, and remarked:

“I am glad of this opportunity of saying a few words in private to you. If I should be unfortunate in this affair, I shall feel inexpressibly obliged if you will carry back some message to those dear to me. Pray see my dear mother, and tell her with what warmth of affection I thought of her. Bid a tender adieu to Rose, and pray her to think of me. Bid farewell, also, to Mr. Warburton, from whom I have experienced so much kindness, and for whom I have the greatest regard.”

He then paused for a short time before he proceeded, and his faltering voice betrayed his emotion.

“Should Mildred never behold me again, she will understand that her penitence has produced the greatest effect upon me. I fully believe in it, and entirely forgive her.”

“Never was repentance more deep and sincere than hers,” said Sister Aline; “and I feel convinced that her sins—great as they are—will be pardoned. Darcy is responsible for them. But I entreat you, address a few lines to the poor penitent, which I will convey. They will be the greatest comfort, and in return I will promise you her prayers.”

“Your request shall be complied with,” replied Stanley, with much emotion.

Just then, another open carriage, containing Darcy and his friends, arrived on the ground. Evidently they had come on the same errand as themselves.

Next moment the compte came up, and pointed them out.

“We had better hasten our departure, since they have come,” he said.

"Decidedly," replied Stanley. "How will you get back to Dieppe?" he said to Sister Aline.

"I have a carriage close by," she replied. "It is yonder at the further side of the mound."

"Bear in mind," said Stanley, "that the meeting will take place to-morrow morning at eight o'clock punctually. You will confer the greatest favour possible upon me, if you will be upon the ground at the time, as I may possibly—though I trust I shall not—require your services. If you comply with my request, pray station yourself near this eminence!"

"Before eight o'clock to-morrow morning, I will be here," she rejoined.

Descending the further side of the mound, she entered the carriage waiting for her, and returned to Dieppe.

At the same time, Stanley, attended by his friends, went down the front of the little eminence, and bowing formally to Darcy and the two officers, who returned their salutes just as stiffly, drove back to the *Etablissement des Bains*, where they passed the rest of the morning.

Again they dined at the Casino, and once more met Darcy and his friends.

## XXVIII.

## THE MEETING.

APPARENTLY, the hostile party were in tolerably good spirits, for they drank two or three bottles of champagne.

"Take my advice," said the compte to Stanley. "Don't touch champagne to-day."

At six o'clock next morning, a close carriage, containing only Sister Aline, left Dieppe, and took the road to the Château d'Arques, but only proceeded so far as the old oak, near to which the sister alighted, and after gazing for a short time on the spot which seemed to awaken very painful memories, she ascended the adjacent mound.

The morning was extremely fine, and the prospect beautiful, but she looked sad and preoccupied, and noticed nothing but the scene of the former duel.

Looking toward it, she exclaimed :

"This day I trust thou wilt be avenged. Nay, I am assured of it. He who ventured to judge and punish others shall now be judged and punished in his turn. The hour of vengeance is, at length, arrived. Be present, if thou can'st—though unseen—and witness the defeat and chastisement of this wicked and deceitful man! May the bullet aimed against him be lodged deep in his breast—and when he falls, may he never rise again!"

As she concluded her half-frenzied invocation, she fancied that the shade of Sir Thomas Starkey was hovering near.

She then knelt down on the ground and prayed long and fervently.

An hour later three well-appointed carriages were standing in front of the Hôtel Royal.

The foremost was intended for the Compte de Clairvaux and M. Martin, the surgeon—the latter having already taken his place inside, while his assistant, with a bag filled with

surgical instruments, had mounted by the side of the coachman.

The two other carriages were destined for those about to be actually engaged in the duel—it being intended that Darcy and his friends should proceed first to the ground.

The morning, as we have already mentioned, was exceedingly beautiful, so that if their errand had been an agreeable one, they might have anticipated a very pleasant drive.

Darcy and his friends had disappeared before Stanley and the others set out, but they were in no hurry as they knew the Comte de Clairvaux would arrange everything for them.

In half an hour all these persons had reached their destination.

Perceiving Sister Aline on the mound, Stanley went to say a few words to her, and was received with the assurance of victory.

"Listen to me," she said. "Since I have been here—on this mound—I have seen Sir Thomas."

"You fancy so," said Stanley, sceptically.

"I am certain of it," she rejoined. "He stood before me, as he lived. I then questioned him as to your likelihood of success, and he told me you would infallibly win."

"You have put fresh courage in my heart," said Stanley.

"Place yourself before your antagonist without fear," said Sister Aline. "Success is certain."

"I hope so," said Stanley. "But should these anticipations prove delusive—should I fall, come down to me!"

"I will," she replied.

Stanley then descended to his friends, feeling confident of success.

By this time the ground had been measured, and this necessary duty had been performed by Colonel Seymour and Mr. Wynn, assisted by the comte.

The order was then given that no one must remain on the ground, except the principals—the surgeon and his assistant being stationed as near the spot as was consistent with safety.

Before the comte retired, Colonel Seymour came up to him and asked whether any arrangement was possible between the parties, as he should be very happy to promote it.

"I do not think so, colonel," replied the comte. "The

feeling is very strong on the part of my friend, Mr. Stanley Brereton."

On applying to Mr. Wynn and Mr. Linton, the colonel found the opinion confirmed. These gentlemen declared their instructions were positive. No arrangement whatever could be made.

"Nothing, I regret to say, can be done," said Colonel Seymour to the comte. "The matter must be fought out."

"Then let the men be placed, Colonel. Further delay is needless."

This was done, and the expectant combatants regarded each other sternly.

Pistol-cases were then produced, and a loaded weapon delivered to each person about to be engaged in the conflict.

When Stanley received his pistol, he experienced a sensation such as he had never felt before. He had an ardent desire for vengeance, but could not keep his hand quite steady, and was afraid that this nervous excitement, slight as it was, might interfere with his aim.

He felt his antagonist's eye fixed upon him, and kept his own eye on his antagonist.

Thus they remained for about half a minute, perfectly motionless, and with pistols lowered.

With the exception of Colonel Seymour, the seconds had now retired, but hitherto, the colonel had remained sufficiently near to superintend the proceedings.

He now drew back a few paces, and at the same moment the two combatants began slowly and steadily to raise their pistols.

As soon as he thought the weapons high enough, he clapped his hands, and both combatants fired, as nearly as possible at the same instant—though, perhaps, Stanley was first.

For a moment, it was impossible to say whether either was hit; but, as Colonel Seymour and Captain Townley moved towards Darcy, the latter placed his hand upon his breast, and the expression of his countenance showed that he was hurt.

"You won't continue the conflict, I suppose?" said the colonel.

"I cannot," replied Darcy faintly. "I am dangerously hurt. I shan't be able to stand more than a minute longer,"

"Here is Monsieur Martin," said the compte, bringing up the surgeon.

After assisting Darcy to take off his coat and waistcoat, the surgeon opened the shirt, which he found deeply stained with blood.

"It is a very bad wound," he said, as he examined it, "and you must prepare for the worst."

Darcy bore himself like a brave man at this formidable announcement, but he certainly would have fallen to the ground if some powerful restorative had not been applied.

His two seconds having come up, he leaned for support against Colonel Seymour's shoulder.

At the same moment, Sister Aline, who had descended from the mound, whence she had witnessed the conflict, came up and asked if she could render him any religious service.

"Pray for me," he replied, faintly.

At the same time the surgeon whispered in her ear:

"Understand he is mortally wounded."

She then knelt down at Darcy's feet, and prayed fervently for him, concluding thus, "Deliver his soul, O Lord! May he rest in peace!"

Meanwhile, Captain Townley kept all persons, except the surgeon and his assistant, from approaching the dying man.

At the conclusion of Sister Aline's prayer, Darcy slightly raised his head, and said in a low voice to Colonel Seymour:

"Who is there standing beside me?"

"Where?" demanded the colonel. "There is no one except that devotee, who has finished her prayer."

"There is a figure standing near me. Don't you perceive it?"

"No," replied the colonel, "it is mere fancy."

"It seems like Sir Thomas Starkey," said Darcy, awe-stricken.

"It is Sir Thomas Starkey," replied Sister Aline.

"Dismiss the notion from your mind, if you can," said the colonel. "Ah! he is gone!" he exclaimed, as a deep groan was heard, and he had nothing but an inert mass to sustain.

"Heaven pardon him," ejaculated Sister Aline, seeing what had happened, and turning to depart.

Colonel Seymour laid the body gently on the ground, while the others gathered round it.

## XXIX.

## GEORGETTE AGREES TO ACCOMPANY SISTER ALINE.

As Sister Aline walked quickly towards her carriage, which she had ordered to wait for her at a particular place, she saw her former attendant, Georgette, coming towards her, and as she had still a great regard for that devoted servant, she stopped to say a word to her.

"Do you know what has just happened, Georgette?"

"No, dearest sister," replied the other, making her a profound reverence. "I could see that somebody was killed, but could not tell who it was."

"It was Captain Darcy, the officer who shot poor Sir Thomas Starkey, and has now got punished in his turn. I trust he has been able to make his peace with Heaven, for he had many heavy sins on his head. He was shot by Stanley Brereton, with whose beautiful young wife he had eloped, but would not stay with him, and is now a sincere penitent. Stanley Brereton is a nephew of Sir Thomas Starkey, so you see there is retributive justice in what has happened."

"I do—I do, dearest sister! How pleased I am that the wicked Darcy has been killed, and on the very spot where poor Sir Thomas fell. Oh! it is most satisfactory!"

"Hear me, Georgette," said the sister. "I am now going back, as soon as I can, to England. Will you attend me?"

"Nothing I should like so much, dearest sister."

"For the present I am residing with the poor penitent lady I have just mentioned to you, and entirely devote myself to her. Formerly, I know, you were greatly attached to me, and I found it very hard to part with you."

"I am just as much attached to you now, dearest sister."

"Will it take you long to make your arrangements for the journey."

"Only so long as I shall require to pack up my things. I am now at home."

"Your parents used to live at a small house not far from the Hôtel Royal."

"They live there still. I shall only need to drive there—to tell my mother I am going to England with Sister Aline—to pack my little valise—and all is ready."

"Come then!" said Sister Aline.

And she hastened to her carriage, closely attended by Georgette.

"I have my *malles* with me," she said. "So I need not go back to the hotel. Tell the coachman where your mother lives—bid him drive there at once, and then get in with me."

Georgette obeyed, gave all needful explanations to the coachman, and in a few minutes more was seated by Sister Aline, and on her way to Dieppe.

Georgette's mother was delighted with the arrangement just made, and assisted her daughter to pack up the scanty luggage she meant to take with her. When this was prepared their valises were sent on board the packet, which fortunately did not start for Newhaven till noon. The house where Sister Aline stopped in the interim being close to the Hôtel Royal, as we have already intimated, she witnessed a very painful spectacle.

It was the body of a handsome and gallant gentleman, who had gone forth full of confidence and spirit a few hours before to fight a duel, and had been brought back with a mortal wound in his breast by a surgeon and his assistant.

## XXX.

## HOW THE TIDINGS OF DARCY'S FATE WERE RECEIVED.

WELL knowing what anxiety would be felt on his account by his mother and Mr. Warburton, Stanley's first business on returning from the place of meeting to Dieppe was to send each a telegraphic message, stating the result of the duel.

Most welcome were these tidings, and the relief afforded by them incalculable.

Fear, by this time, had got the better of Mrs. Brereton, and feeling almost certain that Stanley would fall by the hand of his formidable adversary, she could not help imparting her uneasiness to Rose, who was almost equally alarmed.

It will be imagined, therefore, what they felt on learning that Stanley had been victorious, and the dreaded Darcy killed.

Now that the affair was decided, and so satisfactorily, Mrs. Brereton declared she had never had any doubt about it. It could not be otherwise. Darcy, the wrong-doer, would never be permitted to triumph, and was very properly punished. At the good news, the whole aspect of the place was changed and joy and triumph succeeded to dejection and gloom.

"We will drive over to Beaucliffe, my dear, this afternoon," said Mrs. Brereton to Rose. "It is worth while fighting a duel if one can come off in this way."

Much the same sort of thing occurred at Beaucliffe.

By this time it had somehow or other oozed out that a meeting was about to take place between Stanley and Darcy and everybody felt anxious for the former.

No sooner did the squire receive his telegram, than he hastened to impart it to Mildred.

"The duel has taken place!" he cried, as he entered the room.

"And what has happened?" she exclaimed, starting to her feet.

"Darcy is killed," replied her father. "Killed in precisely the same manner as Sir Thomas Starkey."

"Is it possible?" she rejoined. "He, the invincible—killed? But Heaven had doomed him for his wickedness."

"Well, he will never more trouble any of us!" exclaimed the squire. "A great weight will now be taken from your breast."

"I feel it already," she replied. "While he lived I should never have been easy. I could not even have died in peace."

"Now he is gone," said her father, "I hope you will live. He had poisoned your existence, but his baneful influence is now over. Live!—live!"

"You give me hope," she rejoined. "And now pray leave me by myself, dearest father. I must thank Heaven for liberating me from this dreadful thralldom."

The worthy gentleman gazed at her for a moment or two with the utmost affection, and then left the room.

Kneeling down, Mildred prayed fervently.

Her prayers concluded, she arose with a more cheerful expression of countenance than she had worn for some time.

On going down stairs, the squire repaired to the drawing-room, where he found Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, and told them he had just received a telegram to say that Darcy had been killed in a duel, by Stanley, at Dieppe.

Both were surprised at the unexpected news, but they hailed it with the greatest satisfaction.

"Perhaps it is the best thing that could have happened," said Lady Starkey. "Darcy would have been sure to get into some fresh scrape."

"It is the best thing that could possibly have happened to Mildred," replied the squire. "She is now effectually liberated from him, and I am right glad of it."

Not long afterwards Mrs. Brereton and Rose made their appearance. Both of them exulted rather more in Darcy's death than Mr. Warburton thought proper, and he called them to order.

"Be charitable," he said.

"I cannot be charitable to such a man," rejoined Mrs. Brereton. "Nor does he appear to have been so wonderful a

shot as supposed. When brought to the trial he did not prove a match for Stanley. His crimes, no doubt, weighed down his hand. At any rate, I am very glad he is gone."

"No doubt he richly deserved his fate," said Lady Talmash. "I certainly don't regret him."

"Nor I," said Lady Starkey. "He chose to interfere with my affairs without consulting me, and I certainly felt no gratitude for the service he thought he had rendered me. He had his good points."

"I failed to discover them," said Lady Talmash. "To gratify his passion, he unhesitatingly destroyed the happiness of this family, and has been rightly punished."

"That cannot be denied," said the squire, "and I rejoice that he can do no more mischief."

Next morning Mildred received a letter from Sister Aline, giving her some details of Darcy's death, which she read with much emotion, but they did not produce any serious effect upon her.

On the contrary, she seemed greatly relieved. All her father's affection had returned. He spent part of the evening alone with her and listened to her prayers, which afforded him much consolation; sat with her again in the morning and noticed with much satisfaction, that some improvement had taken place in her looks.

No telegram respecting the duel had been sent her, but next morning's post brought her a letter from Stanley that gave her inexpressible comfort.

It was written before he left Dieppe, and far kinder in tone than anything she had received from him since their separation. Thus it ran:

"I scarcely expected to write to you again, for I did not believe I should survive the duel in which I have just been engaged. But I think I may rightly assume that my cause was just, since my adversary, who was accounted a dead shot, has succumbed while I have escaped unhurt.

"After this result, I am bound to manifest my gratitude to Heaven for my preservation, and I do so by sending you my entire forgiveness.

"May Heaven bless you!"

Mildred showed this letter to her father, and it touched him deeply.

"A reconciliation seems possible, after all," he said.

"Never," replied Mildred. "To that I would never consent, whatever Stanley might do. No, I was anxious to obtain his forgiveness, because it would afford me the greatest consolation, but I never for a moment supposed he would take me back again—nor do I desire it. For what I have done I must suffer. I shall continue the penitent life I have adopted—in which I shall follow the good example set me by Sister Aline. I must not seek a religious retreat—I may not become a member of a sisterhood—but I shall practice my devotions, and perform penance, as I have done of late, and shall never return to the world."

The last words were uttered with a solemnity that left her father little doubt as to her determination being fixed. Nevertheless, he said :

"I sincerely hope you may change your resolution."

"No," she replied, "it is unalterable. I am vowed to Heaven. But for you, dearest father, I would retire to a convent and never emerge from it."

"No, do not leave me, I entreat you!" he said, in an imploring voice. "Remain with me to the last. Everything shall be done to meet your wishes here, and if this part of the house is not sufficiently private for you it shall be made more so."

"I have everything I require," she replied. "The remainder of my life (which will not, probably, be very long) will be passed in repentance. I look at myself with astonishment and horror and marvel that I can have given so much time to folly."

"Well, don't disquiet yourself, my dear," said the squire. "Till this detestable Darcy appeared, your conduct was in every way satisfactory to me. In fact, you were more admired than any other girl in the county."

"As an equestrian, perhaps, papa!"

"More admired altogether," replied Mr. Warburton. "At that time I was very proud of you—and with good reason."

Just then, to their great surprise, Stanley came into the room.

## XXXI.

## STANLEY BIDS MILDRED NOT DESPAIR.

STANLEY had only just returned, and learning that Mr. Warburton was in his daughter's room, hastened thither.

On beholding him, Mildred uttered a slight cry, and springing forward, threw her arms round his neck, though next moment, she drew back, and blamed herself for yielding to the impulse. But Stanley raised no objection, nor did her father.

"Heaven be praised! we see you back again—and victorious!" she exclaimed.

"Ay, victorious," added the squire.

"Yes, I never expected to come back," said Stanley, "but my success proves that when a man has a good cause he need never despair. I was resolved to punish this evil doer—if I could—and I have succeeded."

"You have indeed!" said Mildred; "succeeded most wonderfully."

"I heartily rejoice at your triumphant success," said the squire. "Though I must confess I had great misgivings as to the result of the meeting, I did not attempt to hold you back, because I thought you ought to punish him, or, at all events, try to do so. But as things have turned out, I am truly glad that you went. Nothing but Darcy's death could have satisfied me."

"My feelings must not be mistaken," said Mildred. "I have no pity whatever for Darcy. I can have none. My life has been destroyed by him. He had no real love for me, but had vowed to take me from my husband, and succeeded in his infamous design. I fled with him, but scarcely was the fatal step taken, than I bitterly repented. Then began the punishment, which I have never ceased to feel. Regarding

my destroyer with loathing, I felt it would be intolerable torture to remain with him. So I broke my bonds, and took refuge in my dear father's house."

"There is nothing to disturb the quietude of your life now," said Mr. Warburton.

"I am perfectly convinced of the sincerity of your penitence," said Stanley.

"Alas, alas! no penitence can wipe out my disgrace, and I must endure it to the end."

"Make yourself easy in one respect," said Stanley, with deep feeling; "you shall suffer no annoyance of any kind from me. I have too much respect and regard for your excellent father to do anything that might give him the slightest pain, and I promise you that no steps shall be taken of which he does not entirely approve."

"It is far more than I deserve," she replied, with a grateful look.

"You have always behaved with true filial affection to me," said Mr. Warburton, taking his hand, and pressing it warmly, "and I thank you for my daughter and myself. In her present feeble state of health, I am anxious she should be disturbed as little as possible, and the very great consideration you show her in this respect commands my deepest gratitude. You will have the opportunity of observing the sincerity of her repentance, and will judge how far she merits your kindness."

"I cannot for a moment doubt her sincerity," said Stanley, with great earnestness.

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the opinion you express of me," rejoined Mildred. "It affords me the greatest consolation. I shall now die happy."

"But I trust you may now speedily recover," said Stanley. "You must live for your father's sake."

"Yes, follow that excellent advice," said the squire, brushing his eyes. "I should be miserable without you, so you must get well again, as soon as you can—and there really is nothing now to prevent you."

"I never could have got well while Darcy lived—that is certain," she replied. "Perhaps I may now."

"I hope you may," said Stanley.

"Do you really?" she cried, looking at him.

"Undoubtedly," he replied.

"Then I will—if I can," she rejoined.

Mr. Warburton listened anxiously to what passed between them, and seemed much pleased.

"The prospect altogether seems brighter to-day," he remarked. "The dark clouds that have hung about us so long seem passing off."

"I sincerely hope so," said Stanley. "Nothing would rejoice me more than that Beaucliffe should become again the pleasant house it used to be."

"Since the main difficulty has been removed, there seems nothing to prevent it," said the squire, cheerfully. "Many things occur to me now which I should not have thought of while Darcy lived. But it is too soon to mention them. Nothing can now be decided."

"Your trials, I trust, are nearly at an end," said Stanley to Mildred; "and the remainder of your life may be happy."

Mildred made rather a sad response to this cheerful wish.

"I doubt whether much more life is before me," she said.

"Don't despair," replied Stanley.

"No, don't despair!" added her father. "See how much better things have turned out than we could possibly have expected."

"Despondency will sometimes get the better of me," said Mildred; "but only for a moment or two, and it is now gone. I am truly thankful for what has taken place, and long to express my gratitude to Heaven."

"Then we will afford you an opportunity of doing so," said Stanley, preparing to depart.

"Is it too much to ask you to come and see me to-morrow?" she said.

"I should have come whether you had asked me or not," he replied.

She thanked him by a look, and he followed Mr. Warburton, who had just gone out of the room.

On proceeding to the drawing-room with the squire, Stanley met with an extraordinary reception from the ladies.

No sooner did he make his appearance than they all clapped their hands, and gathering round him gave him an almost embarrassing welcome.

"Why, you have become quite a hero," cried Lady Starkey.

"Everybody, but myself, thought you would be killed," cried his mother, embracing him.

"I didn't suppose everybody knew I was about to fight a duel," he remarked.

"Oh, yes, somehow or other, we all found it out," said Rose. "I own I felt dreadfully frightened, and am uncommonly glad to see you back."

"I hope you won't engage in another duel," said Lady Talmash. "You may not always be equally lucky."

"Depend upon it I won't if I can help it," said Stanley.

The squire now thought it time to interpose.

"You are all treating this matter as a joke," he said, "whereas it's a very serious business."

"We know that quite well," replied Lady Talmash. "But we feel so pleased that we can't look serious."

"Well, I only hope it's the last time I shall be engaged in a mortal quarrel," said Stanley, "especially with a man accounted a dead shot. I thought all was over with me."

"No wonder," said the squire. "It must require some nerve to stand firm when the pistol of an infallible marksman is pointed against you."

"Having just had such experience, I must declare that it does," replied Stanley; "but at the same time I don't think my own nerve forsook me at the critical moment."

"It is clear it did not," observed Lady Starkey. "I sincerely hope this is the last duel you may ever fight. Good fortune may not always attend you, as it did not always attend Darcy. Next time you may be unlucky, like him."

"I am quite content with what I have done," said Stanley. "I won't make another experiment, if I can help it. Before dismissing the subject, let me mention that my adversary's seconds behaved remarkably well, at least I thought so; while Sister Aline, who was present at the time, proved a great comfort to Darcy in his last moments."

"Did he live very long after he was hit?" inquired Lady Starkey.

"No," replied Stanley; "but it is to be hoped that he lived long enough to make his peace with Heaven. Though mortally hurt, he did not fall immediately, and Sister Aline was speedily with him."

"She seems to have behaved very well to him," remarked Mrs. Brereton.

"She behaved admirably," replied Stanley. "That I can testify."

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## XXXII.

SISTER ALINE DELIVERS DARCY'S DYING MESSAGE TO  
MILDRED.

MILDRED had been much gratified by her interview with Stanley—and no wonder! for it almost seemed as if a reconciliation had taken place between them.

The interest he had displayed in her had been far greater than she had reason to expect, and she recalled his every word and dwelt upon them with delight.

No reproaches had been uttered, but on the contrary he had sought to soothe and comfort her, and she felt most grateful for the kindness he had displayed.

In the fervent prayers she subsequently addressed to Heaven, his name was foremost, and she invoked blessings on his head.

Later on in the day Sister Aline returned, and was warmly welcomed. Georgette accompanied her, but was left in the adjoining chamber.

"I have heard all that has happened," said Mildred to her friend; "and am well pleased you were able to attend Darcy at the last. Do you believe his repentance was sincere?"

"I hope so—but can hardly tell," replied the sister.

"He sent a dying message to you, which I promised to deliver."

"Indeed! what is it?" asked Mildred.

"He confessed he had done you great wrong," replied the sister. "I never loved her so passionately as I feigned," he

said, "and took her away from her husband to mortify him."

"Was that his motive?" asked Mildred.

"That was the motive he avowed," replied the sister. "I did not love her," he said, "and though I sought to induce her to come back to me after her flight, I should soon have tired of her had she complied."

"I would have died rather than returned to him," said Mildred.

"The attempt was solely made to provoke your husband, for whom he had conceived a strange aversion," replied Sister Aline. "He confessed that he intended to kill him in the duel, and fully expected to do so. His failure proves that the Evil One, who had thus far lent him aid, had now abandoned him, and left him to his fate. However, he may be pardoned, since he deeply regretted what he had done."

"Stanley must learn this," said Mildred. "He will then understand the person with whom he has had to deal."

"He shall," replied Sister Aline. "It will likewise prove that you have been the victim of a diabolical design."

"The chief feeling by which Darcy was governed seems to have been malice," said Mildred. "I will endeavour to forgive him, but it will be hard to do so. Had I been weak enough to yield to his solicitations, when he came here to lure me back again, what would have been my fate?"

"Heaven guarded you. Your good resolutions were strengthened."

"I saw through his perfidious arts," said Mildred. "But I have been comforted by an interview with Stanley, whom I have just seen. From his manner he does not seem to have lost all affection for me. He was very kind, and said not one harsh word."

"Darcy's death, no doubt, has produced a great effect upon him. I felt sure it would."

"My father was present during the whole of the interview," remarked Mildred, "and seemed much moved by it. It is impossible that any one could have been more considerate than Stanley."

"I am rejoiced to hear it. Whatever may come of it, it cannot fail to have a beneficial effect upon you."

"It may prolong my life," replied Mildred. "Already I

feel better. Had Stanley treated me as he might, with coldness and contempt, I should have sunk. But he has raised me in my own esteem, and I may possibly recover."

"Heaven grant you may," said Sister Aline. "But I do not feel certain your recovery would be agreeable to all the ladies now in this house."

"I cannot die to please them," said Mildred.

"I do not like to indulge worldly thoughts," said Sister Aline; "but some of them will assuredly oppose your return to your former position."

"Even if it should be offered me, I do not intend to resume my former position," said Mildred.

"As yet you cannot tell," said Sister Aline. "Darcy's death seems to have wrought a wonderful change in your husband's feelings, and from your description of his conduct towards you it appears highly probable that a reconciliation will take place. It will certainly be promoted by your father."

"But I should hesitate," said Mildred.

"Why hesitate?" rejoined the other. "If you have any conscientious scruples, give them due weight, but I see occasion for none. Leave the arrangement of the affair to your father. But pray do not offer any needless opposition! You have everything in your favour. You are here, on the spot. You have not to be brought back. All may be quickly settled."

"I must not indulge in these thoughts," said Mildred.

"Wherefore not?" rejoined Sister Aline. "It seems to me that they naturally arise from the present position of affairs. Depend upon it, their speedy consideration will be forced upon you, so you may as well make up your mind at once."

"I cannot! I cannot!" replied Mildred. "I am surprised you should recommend such a course to me."

"Circumstances, I repeat, have totally changed, and you will have to adapt yourself to them, and it seems to me that you can do so without difficulty. But here comes your father," she added, as Mr. Warburton entered the room, and respectfully saluted her.

"I heard you had returned and came to see you. You may be of great use to us at this juncture."

"I shall be happy to aid you in any way, and I think I understand how you require my assistance," replied Sister Aline. "I have learnt with the greatest possible satisfaction, that a perfect reconciliation has just taken place between your daughter and her husband."

"I rejoice to say it is a perfect reconciliation," replied Mr. Warburton.

"The sole obstacle has been removed," said Sister Aline. "From Darcy's dying lips I learnt the truth. He deemed himself rightly punished, and confessed that the wicked design he carried into effect was prompted more by hatred of Stanley than passion for his wife."

"Well, he is gone to his account, and let us think of him no more," said the squire. "I hope Mildred may be able to banish him for ever from her recollection."

"I do not doubt it," said Sister Aline.

"I shall never think of him—save with detestation, and as the destroyer of my happiness," said Mildred.

"There is much happiness in store for you, I trust," said her father.

"Your penitence is sincere, and your husband has pardoned you," said Sister Aline.

"But will the world pardon me?" said Mildred.

"Perhaps not. But what matters the world, if your husband and your father support you?" said Sister Aline.

"As they certainly will," added Mr. Warburton. "Do not distress yourself. All will now be well—of that you may rest assured."

Another interruption was here offered by the entrance of Stanley himself, who seemed as much pleased to meet Sister Aline as the squire had previously been.

"Welcome back again!" he said to her. "I heard that you were here, and came to satisfy you that Mildred and I are now entirely reconciled. Are we not?" he added, appealing to his wife, who heartily assented.

"With his dying lips Darcy completely exculpated her," said Sister Aline, "and confessed he was in fault. Shall I repeat his words?"

"No," replied Stanley. "He has been punished, and that is enough. My desire is entirely to forget him."

"And nothing shall ever remind you of him," said Mildred. "Never again shall his name be mentioned by me!"

"Nor by me," added the squire.

"Let the past be buried in oblivion," said Sister Aline. "The future offers you happiness. Disturb it not by painful recollections."

Stanley then turned to Mr. Warburton and said :

"Henceforward our plans shall be entirely directed by you. Do you not agree in that?" he added to his wife.

"Entirely," she replied.

"You shall have my best advice," replied the old gentleman. "The only difficulty will be at first. But, with a little management all will be easily overcome."

"Overcome it will be since you undertake it, sir," said Sister Aline ; "but not easily."

"Yes, easily, if we go the right way to work," replied Mr. Warburton, confidently.

"There will be considerable disappointment, I fear," said Sister Aline.

"No doubt !—no doubt !" returned the squire. "That must be anticipated. Expectations have been raised that can never be realised, and disappointment must naturally ensue. But I will make matters as smooth as I can."

"I am quite sure of that, sir," said Stanley, "and the course you propose is precisely that which will best please me."

"Pray do not let me be brought forward at first, dear papa," entreated Mildred, "I am not equal to the effort."

"Make yourself easy, my dear love," he rejoined. "You shall be placed in no difficulty that I can possibly avoid. It is somewhat unlucky that certain ladies are here at present—but they really cannot interfere, however much they may feel inclined to do so."

"Interfere they will—on that you may depend," said Stanley. "But their interference will produce little effect, if you stand firm."

"And rest assured I will," said the squire. "And now, since all is satisfactorily settled here, I will go down stairs to look after them."

"Heaven bless him !" exclaimed Sister Aline.

## XXXIII.

## LADY STARKEY'S ADVICE TO MR. WARBURTON.

CONSTERNATION prevailed among the ladies assembled at Beaucliffe.

Things had taken quite a different turn from what they expected. Instead of promoting their plans, Darcy's death seemed completely to have checked them. Stanley's intentions were not quite clear to them, but they had strong suspicions of the truth, since the squire had told them of the reconciliation, which they regarded in a very different light from what he did, and as a most unfortunate step both for Stanley and himself.

After some consultation on the matter, which only served to increase their perplexity and annoyance, they resolved to defer its full consideration till next day.

Meantime, Lady Starkey undertook to have some private talk with Mr. Warburton, and clearly ascertain what was to be the new state of things, that they might know how to act.

This being decided upon, Mrs. Brereton returned with Rose, while Lady Talmash withdrew to her own room, with the intention of remaining there till summoned, leaving Lady Starkey alone in the drawing-room, where Mr. Warburton found her.

From the position she had taken in a retired part of the room, and from her grave looks, he immediately understood her object. But he was rather glad of the proffered *tête-à-tête*, and said so to her ladyship as he approached her.

"I have just come from Mildred's room, where I left Stanley. A complete reconciliation has taken place between them."

"So I expected, after what you had already told me. I think it a very unwise step for Stanley to take, and do not

hesitate to express my deep regret. It is equally unfortunate for you, sir, and I am surprised you should countenance it. Had you consulted me on the subject, I should have advised you most strongly against it."

"I had the strongest inducement to act as I did," replied Mr. Warburton. "Mildred's life, I believe, depended on my acquiescence."

"I can understand paternal tenderness," said Lady Starkey, "but cannot understand Stanley's strange conduct—certainly not appreciate it. Their reunion will not have the effect of restoring her to society; and I am therefore quite at a loss to comprehend what will be gained by it. Of necessity, she must continue the life of complete seclusion she is compelled to lead at present."

"There I entirely differ with your ladyship," rejoined the squire. "But should her friends cease to visit her, I am persuaded she won't regret it. She will have the support of her husband, and my support."

"Are you quite sure she will have her husband's support, sir?"

"Quite sure," replied Mr. Warburton. "He has pledged his word to me to that effect. Besides, nothing can be kinder than his conduct to her."

"I cannot understand it. He is governed by some unaccountable impulse. But it will not last, and what will happen when it ceases? Ask yourself that question, sir. Things will be worse than ever."

"I don't believe it," rejoined Mr. Warburton. "I am certain of my daughter's sincere repentance, and feel confident that her future conduct—should she be spared—will be such as to confirm Stanley's good opinion."

"I hope your notion may prove correct," said Lady Starkey. "But I have my doubts, and feel bound to express them. My opinion is likewise shared by Lady Talmash and Mrs. Brereton, both of whom think Stanley has made a very great mistake, and will find it out ere long. I think it right to give you this warning before the step is irrevocable, and I do so at the hazard of forfeiting your friendship, which I value much. Let the utmost kindness and attention be shown to Mildred, but do not place her in a position certain to produce greater misery than she has yet endured."

"If I thought so, I might hesitate," replied the squire; "but I am confident your apprehensions are ill-founded. I have entire faith in her, and so has Stanley. Ah! here he is to speak for himself," he added, as the person in question entered the room.

"Lady Starkey has been severely censuring the step we have just taken in regard to Mildred, and declares we shall bitterly repent it."

"You will, I am certain, Stanley," she said. "Is it too late to retreat?"

"I have no intention of retreating," he replied. "I am quite satisfied with the explanation given by Mildred, whose conduct, though imprudent in the extreme, has not been as guilty as supposed. Confirmation has been given to Mildred's statement by Darcy's dying confession made to Sister Aline, in which he acquitted her of all but imprudence."

Lady Starkey looked incredulous.

"I cannot believe Mildred's statement, even supported by Sister Aline," she said.

"I firmly believe it," rejoined Stanley; "and I shall feel highly indignant if your ladyship persists in your doubts after this explanation."

"Which I can confirm in all particulars," added Mr. Warburton.

"I do not like to say so," rejoined Lady Starkey; "but I cannot but think that you have both been imposed upon."

"How?—imposed upon!" cried Mr. Warburton. "Your ladyship is strangely unwilling to believe the truth."

"It almost seems as if you had some motive for this incredulity," observed Stanley.

"My motive is unwillingness to see you made a dupe," she replied. "But let us postpone any further consideration of the matter till to-morrow, when your mother will be here, and when Lady Talmash can give you her opinion."

"I do not care for Lady Talmash's opinion," said Stanley. "I am fully satisfied, and neither her ladyship nor any one else will shake my conviction of the truth. However, I am quite willing to discuss the subject, as you propose, to-morrow. But it must be for the last time."

Thereupon, he and the squire bowed to Lady Starkey, and went out through the open window into the garden.

## THE SHORES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN.

## I.

## SISTER ALINE'S TESTIMONY IN FAVOUR OF MILDRED.

NEXT morning Mrs. Brereton, accompanied by Rose, came over to Beaucliffe.

They were received by Stanley, who conducted the younger lady to the drawing-room, at the door of which he left her and then took his mother to the library, where they found Mr. Warburton writing letters.

On the entrance of Mrs. Brereton he immediately desisted from his task and welcomed her as heartily as ever; but it was evident from her looks and manner that the lady was displeased both with him and her son.

"You don't seem quite the thing this morning, my dear madam," said the squire, as he gave her a chair. "I hope nothing has occurred to put you out."

"Pardon me, sir," she rejoined. "A great deal has occurred to put me out. I don't think I had a wink of sleep all night. I have been thinking over what I heard yesterday of the probable reconciliation between Stanley and Mildred, and I really cannot make up my mind to permit it. I must tell you both plainly what I feel," she added, looking from one to the other.

"I am very much surprised by what you say, mother," observed Stanley, beginning to exhibit symptoms of impatience. "In an affair of this kind it appears to me that I myself am the best judge. If I am satisfied, you ought to be."

"And some respect, surely, ought to be paid to my opinion,"

said Mr. Warburton, rather sharply. "My view of the case is totally changed from what it was at first. I now know the truth, of which I was ignorant at the time."

"But you were aware that your daughter had eloped, I suppose, sir?" rejoined Mrs. Brereton.

"I was totally unaware of the peculiar character of the elopement, ma'am," said Mr. Warburton. "Darcy's dying confession enlightened me. He completely exonerated Mildred. It was an act of extreme imprudence and folly on her part—but that was all."

Mrs. Brereton stared at him in surprise.

"If I could believe that, I might think differently," she said, gravely.

"I can corroborate the statement," said Stanley. "Folly there has been, as Mr. Warburton has just told you—but nothing more."

"I am very glad of it," said Mrs. Brereton. "My only regret is that matters have proceeded so far with Rose. But she has behaved very well, and though she admits that her disappointment is exceedingly great she declares you shall have no reproaches from her."

"She is a noble-hearted girl," said Stanley.

"I am quite of the same opinion," said the squire.

By this time Mrs. Brereton's displeasure was gone; her looks had become cheerful.

"The ladies shall be immediately acquainted with the explanation you have given me, and I do not think they can have anything more to say against the arrangement. At all events, I consider Stanley has acted properly and shall decidedly support him."

"I am glad to hear you say so, madam," observed Mr. Warburton.

"I am convinced I am acting for the best," said Stanley. "I should have bitterly reproached myself if any ill consequences had ensued, which I could have prevented."

"I will go at once to the ladies, and tell them what I now think," said Mrs. Brereton.

"You will find them in the drawing-room, I make no doubt," said Mr. Warburton. "And I am persuaded they will come round to our opinion. They won't change mine, whatever they say or do."

"Nor mine," added Stanley, as he opened the door for his mother.

Mrs. Brereton found the ladies in the drawing-room, as she expected, looking very cross, while poor Rose appeared extremely despondent.

"Well, what news do you bring?" cried Lady Starkey, eagerly. "Has Stanley become more reasonable?"

"He is more determined than ever to carry out his plans," replied Mrs. Brereton, "and I cannot but approve of the course he is pursuing, after the explanation he has just given me."

"What! you support the reconciliation?" cried Lady Starkey. "I should never have expected it."

"Nor I," added Lady Talmash, equally surprised.

"What will you say when you learn that Mildred's flight was merely a trick to annoy Stanley? There was nothing serious about it."

Lady Starkey laughed incredulously.

"We are not to be duped by such an explanation as that," she said, "and I can't suppose you are."

"I am satisfied of its truth," rejoined Mrs. Brereton.

"Then you will believe anything," said Lady Talmash.

"Is it too absurd to be treated seriously," muttered Rose.

"Nevertheless, I maintain its absolute truth," said Mrs. Brereton. "It was a silly and perilous scheme, very likely to lead to serious consequences, suggested by Darcy and put in practice by him to annoy Stanley. Darcy confessed this with his dying lips to Sister Aline and expressed his deep contrition."

They all looked surprised at this statement, but still remained incredulous.

"Darcy's confession—granted it was made, of which I don't feel certain," said Lady Starkey, "produces no effect on me. He may have had a motive for what he said."

"Probably he desired to clear Mildred and set her right with her husband," said Lady Talmash.

"Such conduct does not seem quite consistent with his character," remarked Rose.

"Not at all," said Mrs. Brereton. "I repeat I entirely believe Sister Aline's statement and acquit Mildred of the grave part of the offence."

At this moment the door opened, and Mildred herself entered the room.

She looked very pale and weak, and was supported by Stanley, and closely followed by her father and Sister Aline.

Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash were quite startled by her unexpected appearance, but they arose and formally saluted her, while Mrs. Brereton and Rose Rose advanced and shook hands with her affectionately.

Though looking extremely pale and delicate, as we have just said, she had acquired a beauty of another and very touching kind, that exercised a powerful effect upon the two ladies who had joined her. Her voice was low and sweet, and her manner remarkably gentle.

Stanley was evidently much offended by the reception she met with from Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, and thus addressed them in a cold, sarcastic tone :

"As it is just possible—after what has occurred—that you may not prolong your stay at Beaucliffe, I have brought my wife to bid you adieu."

"I very much regret that circumstances have prevented my seeing you during your stay," said Mildred. "But I have been seriously indisposed, as you are aware——"

"Oh, yes ; we are quite aware of it," Lady Starkey hastened to say, in a haughty and somewhat insolent tone. "Had we been aware of your intended return we should not have come here at all."

"Extremely unlikely, I think," said Lady Talmash. "I consider we have been very much affronted."

Mildred took no notice of this rudeness, but Stanley looked excessively angry, and Mr. Warburton got very red in the face.

"I am very sorry you were invited," he said

"I think we might have been allowed to depart without annoyance or insult," said Lady Talmash, haughtily.

"Neither annoyance nor insult have at any time been offered to your ladyship," said the squire, "and I cannot allow such an imputation to be made."

"I, too, must contradict it," said Stanley. "Your ladyship has always been treated with the utmost respect while you have stayed at Beaucliffe. That I affirm."

"Pray let me retire, dear Stanley," implored Mildred.

"This scene is too much for me. I did not expect it or I would not have come."

"You might have expected it," said Lady Starkey. "But Stanley is chiefly to blame."

"In what way am I to blame?" he rejoined. "I have acted like a man of honour. I have been greatly affronted, but I have exacted reparation and punished the offender with death. My wife, I admit, has been indiscreet—very indiscreet—her conduct has been misconstrued, and she has been blamed far too severely. I now proclaim her innocence to you, who have constituted yourselves her judges. She is innocent of all, save folly."

"That I emphatically declare," said Sister Aline, coming forward, "and I have had the very best opportunity of arriving at the truth. I have listened to a dying man's confession. That man was Darcy himself. With his latest breath he exonerated Mildred."

"If this testimony does not satisfy you, nothing will," said Mr. Warburton.

"It matters not to me what others think, so long as I, myself, am satisfied," said Stanley.

"Oh, thank you! thank you for that declaration," exclaimed Mildred.

And uttering a cry, she fell senseless in his arms.

"You have killed her," he said, looking sternly and reproachfully at the two ladies, as he bore her to a couch, followed by Sister Aline and Rose.

"I'm afraid we have gone rather too far," said Lady Starkey.

"It almost seems so," said Lady Talmash. "I did not believe she was so ill."

"I did not believe your ladyship had so little feeling," remarked Mr. Warburton, who overheard what was said.

"Can I be of any service to your daughter, sir?" said Lady Starkey to him.

"Not in the least," he replied, angrily. "You are more likely to do her harm than good. I beg you won't go near her—nor you," he added to Lady Talmash.

"I really am excessively sorry for what has occurred," said the latter lady.

Your ladyship can't expect me to believe you," he re-

joined. "If anything happens, I shall attribute it entirely to you and Lady Starkey."

Fortunately, Sister Aline always carried restoratives about her, and before this a few drops of sal volatile had been administered to Mildred and produced a beneficial effect.

"Pray allow me to remain here till your daughter recovers, Mr. Warburton?" said Lady Starkey. "I will then relieve you of my presence."

"I must beg a like favour of you, sir," added Lady Talmash.

"Stay as long as you like, ladies," replied the easily mollified old gentleman, moving towards his daughter, who had now completely regained consciousness.

"Are they gone?" she asked, as he came up.

"Who, my love?" he inquired.

"Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash."

"No, my darling," he rejoined. "They are still here."

"Then beg them to come to me for a moment," she said.

"Better not," he rejoined.

But, moved by her looks, he consented and went to them.

"My daughter would fain say a word to you before you go. If you grant her request, I must beg that you will not excite her."

Contrary to his anticipations, they both instantly went back with him. Sister Aline, Mrs. Brereton and the others, standing near the sofa, drew back as they came up.

Mildred regarded them very affectionately, and they were evidently much touched by her looks, and reproached themselves for their conduct.

"We are so very glad you have recovered, dearest Mildred," said Lady Talmash, taking her hand. "If anything had happened to you I should never have forgiven myself—never!"

"I know you are the most amiable creature breathing," said Lady Starkey, approaching on the other side of the sofa. "Pray think no more of what has just occurred!"

"I won't," replied Mildred. "But you must promise not to leave me."

"We will stay till you get quite well," said Lady Starkey.

"Even if you should be a month about it," added Lady Talmash.

"Don't be afraid! I shall get well directly now," said Mildred, with the sweetest smile imaginable.

"I am so glad your ladyship has come round to my opinion," said Mrs. Brereton, drawing near Lady Starkey.

Everybody now seemed to think the two ladies had completely made amends for their previous rudeness. Even Stanley's anger had abated.

After a little quiet conversation with them, Mildred retired to her own room attended by Stanley and Sister Aline.

Before withdrawing she said to Rose:

"If I don't come down to-morrow, you must come up to me. I should like to have a little talk with you."

"You will be sure to see me," replied the other, highly pleased by the invitation."

"All has ended very much better than I expected at one time," said Lady Starkey. "I was touched to the heart by Mildred's looks."

"She looked like an angel," added Lady Talmash. "I don't believe any ill of her."

"Every possible care must be taken of her," said Rose. "I'm sure she is exceedingly delicate."

"I almost fear she is in a consumption," said Lady Starkey.

"She ought to spend next winter in the south of France," said Lady Talmash.

## II.

## SUPPER IN THE SERVANTS' HALL.

"I AM glad that those two important dames didn't take their departure," said Mildred, as she entered her own room with her companions. "A quarrel with them just now would have troubled me very much."

"I confess I should be glad to get rid of them," said Stanley. "They have fixed themselves here and mean to stay."

"But they are agreeable guests," said Mildred.

"Agreeable when they have it all their way. But not when their plans are thwarted, as has just been shown."

"I think them designing, and somewhat malicious," remarked Sister Aline.

"And you judge them rightly," said Stanley. "They *are* designing. Lady Starkey fancied at one time that she should gain Mr. Warburton's hand. But they are both disappointed since Mildred's return. That is the real cause of their vexation."

"So I should suppose," said Sister Aline. "But will Mr. Warburton marry again, do you think?"

"Certainly not now, since Mildred has come back," replied Stanley. "What he might have done, had she left us altogether, I cannot say."

"No, no, I'm quite sure papa won't marry again," said Mildred. "Those two ladies would never have been established here, had I been at home. But they have completely failed. Rose Hylton, I think, is a very nice, amiable girl."

"So she is," said Stanley. "My mother likes her extremely."

Just then, Georgette's voice was heard at the door, and Sister Aline bade her come in.

On entering, she said she had been invited to supper that evening in the servants' hall, and asked if she might accept the invitation.

Her mistress replied in the affirmative, but said she must return to her own room before ten.

"That will be quite late enough for me," said Georgette, and she withdrew.

"Who is that pretty *soubrette*?" inquired Stanley.

"She was formerly my attendant," replied Sister Aline. "I brought her with me from Dieppe. She witnessed your duel with Darcy. She has been very useful, and I shall take her back with me when I return."

"No, you must leave her with me," said Mildred. "I have become very fond of her and should be quite grieved to part with her."

"Well, she shall remain with you, if you wish it," replied the sister.

Georgette's good looks, liveliness and pretty figure, set off by a very becoming costume, caused quite a sensation among the men-servants at Beacliffe, who were all charmed with her. Mr. Glossop, the portly butler, who placed her between himself and Dominique, the French cook, at supper, declared she was better looking than any lady in the house; and the two valets, Robert and Charles, agreed with him in opinion. Buckland the coachman, and Warton the groom regarded her with admiration, as did the *chef*, who was fortunate enough to have her near him.

As may be supposed, the many lady's maids, housemaids, and other female servants, assembled in the hall, did not admire her so much as the men, but even they were compelled to admit that she was extremely captivating.

Though she didn't speak English very fluently, she managed to make herself understood, as much by her eyes and gestures as by her words, and Dominique acted as her interpreter.

Besides which, the attentive *chef* took care to help her to all the best dishes, so that she did very well—especially as Glossop had provided a bottle of Cliquot for his particular friends.

Animated by a couple of glasses of this inspiring wine, which often unlocks the secrets of the heart, Georgette questioned Dominique as to what had recently occurred at

the hall, and learnt from him the full particulars of Madame Stanley Brereton's elopement with le Capitaine Darcy.

"It is the custom, among the family, to regard it as a mere innocent caprice, *une boutade à faquiner son mari*, but I confess I cannot look upon it so lightly."

"Then you don't understand our sex, Maitre Dominique," returned Georgette. "I saw the duel between the husband and the betrayer at Dieppe, and a most terrible affair it was. I know *le galant capitaine* proclaimed madame's entire innocence, *avec sa dernière parole*. What could he do more?"

"Not much, certainly," replied Dominique. "But under such circumstances he ought never to have gone away with her. Besides, he came secretly to the Hall, since her return, to carry her off again."

"All that has been explained," cried Georgette. "No insinuation shall prejudice me against her. I think her just like a *sainte*."

"What saint are you talking about?" inquired Glossop.

"Saint Mildred," replied Dominique.

"Madame Stanley Brereton," explained Georgette. "I adore her. She is so beautiful—so good."

"She is all you describe," rejoined the butler. "But I'm sadly afraid she won't live long."

"Oh, don't frighten me!" exclaimed Georgette. "I shall die myself if she dies."

"No, don't do that," said Glossop. "Those ladies have behaved to her in a most unfeeling manner."

"*Honteusement!*" cried Georgette. "But all is now arranged to their satisfaction—so they won't interfere any more."

"I hope not, but don't feel sure," rejoined Glossop.

The evening was finished by a rubber at whist played in a small room near the butler's pantry, between Glossop himself and Georgette, against Dominique and Lady Starkey's lady's maid.

Glossop played a very good game, and was tolerably well satisfied with his partner.

"It never can happen," he said, "but I should amazingly like to play a rubber with the squire. I think he would be satisfied with me."

"No doubt he would," said Dominique. Then addressing

himself to Georgette, he added, "You must take care not to say anything about cards, mamzelle, when you go up-stairs."

"Are cards interdicted?" she inquired.

"Rigorously," he replied.

"But we are not playing for money," she said.

"Pardon, mamzelle," he rejoined, with a significant smile, "Maitre Glossop and I have some slight stakes. I already owe him twenty shillings."

"Mon Dieu!" she exclaimed. "Vous êtes grands joueurs!"

"This is nothing to what we sometimes do at écarté," said Glossop, laughing. "Shall we have another game and change partners?"

"Oh! *non! non!*" cried Georgette, intimating by her gestures, that she could not stay a moment longer.

"You must promise to sup with us again soon," said Dominique, catching her hand and pressing it to his lips.

Glossop would have snatched the other hand, but she broke away from them, and next moment was skipping up-stairs towards Sister Aline's room.

"Well, Georgette," said her mistress, "I hope you have had a pleasant evening."

"Charming, madame, charming!" she replied. "I have another invitation and hope you will permit me to accept it."

"I will consider to-morrow. Are you aware you are half an hour late?"

"Is it possible, madame? I did not think so. But time flies swiftly, when one is amused. Pray forgive me!"

"Well, go to the next room and see whether Madame Stanley Brereton wants you."

Georgette readily obeyed, and Mildred, who had already sought her couch, bade her sit down beside her.

"I want to ask you a question, Georgette? Shall you be content to remain with me when Sister Aline returns to Dieppe?"

"More than content, madam. I shall be delighted. I hope you will always keep me with you. I will serve you faithfully and well."

"I have no doubt of it," rejoined Mildred. "I have a foreboding that I shall not live long."

"Madame must not despair. I confidently believe she will recover."

"No, Georgette; there is no chance of that. But with care, I may last a few months longer. You must give me that care."

"Rest assured, I will, madame" said Georgette earnestly, almost solemnly, "I will devote myself to you."

"Then there is no knowing what good results may follow," said Mildred.

"It may be a satisfaction to madame to learn how attached to her are the other servants. I had an opportunity of proving it this evening."

"I'm very glad to hear it, Georgette. And now I will wish you good night. Recollect that henceforward you belong to me."

"I shall not forget it," she replied.

And kissing the hand of her new mistress, she withdrew.

Mildred slept more tranquilly that night than she had done for some time.

## III.

## AN ACCIDENT ON THE MERE.

THE peaceful slumber Mildred had enjoyed was of so much service to her, that Georgette, on entering her room next morning, noticed an improvement in her looks and declared, if madame would only go on in this way for a month, no fears need be entertained about her.

"I certainly feel better, to-day," said Mildred, "and if the weather continues fine I shall walk out into the garden. You must accompany me, Georgette."

"I shall be delighted, madame," replied the attendant.

"Perhaps I may be able to reach the Mere?"

"What is that, madame?"

"The lake at the bottom of the garden."

"Oh, I have always admired it so much. I think it so beautiful."

"So it is," replied Mildred. "I once used to be very fond of rowing upon it; but I have given that up lately, as I have horse exercise."

"Yes, I have always understood madame used to be a famous equestrian."

Mildred smiled.

"I had far more enjoyment in riding to hounds than in any other sport," she said.

"Then why give it up?" cried Georgette.

"I have not strength for it now," she replied, rather sadly.

"But madame's strength will return."

"I hope it may, but I have great doubts."

"Madame must go and visit the stables. I understand none of her favourite hunters have been sold."

"Though I once was passionately fond of them, I have never inquired about them since my return. But I shouldn't wonder if it is so. Papa was always so kind. But dear Sister Aline would be dreadfully shocked if I should begin to hunt again. She would think the chase wholly inconsistent with my profession. And so it would be."

"But madame might go out occasionally merely for the benefit of her health."

"No, it would lead to other things. I must resist temptation. I have become a penitent and must act consistently with that character."

"You are quite right," said Sister Aline, who had entered the room unperceived and overheard the discourse. "I, myself, see no harm in hunting, quietly conducted; but there are certain dangers connected with it, on which I need not dwell, and I think you had better avoid all temptation. I only hope you are not miscalculating your strength."

"Yes, I must be a very different person from that I now am, if I am ever able to enter the hunting field again. I often wonder at myself when I think of what I have done."

"I know you were considered the boldest and best female equestrian in Cheshire at one time," said Sister Aline, "and so much was said in your praise that no wonder your head was a little turned."

"I was very vain in those days," said Mildred.

"And not without reason," murmured Georgette. "Shall I serve breakfast!" she added aloud.

"Yes, in the next room," replied Mildred.

"Can I do anything more for madame before I go?"

"No; we will come to you in half an hour," said Sister Aline. "Have all ready for us."

Georgette disappeared, and at the appointed time the others joined her.

A very simple meal, consisting of two basins of new milk and slices of bread, without butter or any other addition, awaited them.

But Georgette fared much better. Not only had she hot coffee, with boiling milk, but toast and a couple of poached eggs, in her own room.

About an hour later, when Stanley came up-stairs, he found them all prepared for a walk on the lawn, and on hearing Mildred's desire of visiting the Mere he expressed his satisfaction.

"You could not have chosen a better day," he said; "and even if you go on the water, I don't think you will take any harm."

Never had the smooth-shaven lawn looked more inviting than on that charming morning, and Georgette, who followed the party, was positively enraptured, and constantly uttered exclamations of delight.

She admired the garden and the lawn, as we have just said. She admired the fine wood skirting the Mere, and was enchanted with the Mere itself, which she thought the most beautiful sheet of water she had ever beheld. She had seen it at a distance, but had never stood beside it as she did now, and she thought those gentle slopes with the lovely expanse of water they bordered were most exquisite.

While gazing at the banks she perceived a boat chained to a post, and longed to embark in it, but her mistress made no proposition to that effect—nor did Stanley. In fact, the party contented themselves with standing on the bank and contemplating the fair scene. Every moment some fresh beauties were discovered.

"I dare not suggest a row on the Mere for fear I should do wrong," said Stanley. "But it looks uncommonly tempting."

"The aspect of the lake revives all my former feeling, and the day is so warm and genial that I cannot think half an hour on the water would do me harm. But here comes papa," as the squire was seen approaching with Rose; "let us consult him. I want your permission to go on the water," she said to him.

"Well, I think I may safely give it to you," he replied.

"I will take an oar if you want one," said Rose.

"Then we shall do famously," remarked Stanley.

"The boat is large enough to hold us all. I will go and bring it here."

"I will go with you," said Rose.

The boat was at no great distance, and in two or three minutes they had unfastened it and brought it close to the

bank. It did not belong to the light skiff class, but was large and roomy and well adapted to such a party as were now about to embark in it.

Mildred sat between Sister Aline and Georgette. The latter had gained the object of her wishes, and could scarcely restrain her delight.

When everybody was settled, Stanley and his fair assistant pushed off and rowed slowly towards the further end of the Mere.

Familiar with the beauties of the place, the squire pointed them out to Rose, who was charmed with all she beheld.

There was nothing remarkable in the surroundings of the lake, but the banks were soft and gentle. Nothing grand or striking. Only a solitary rock amid the woods, from which it was supposed the mansion derived its name.

On this picturesque crag it was said that an eagle once built its nest, and killed a youth, who attempted to rob it of its young. No doubt, the squire had good right to be proud of this part of his park, as he himself had caused its full beauties to be developed by judiciously thinning the timber, and had likewise carefully protected the oldest trees.

To Rose's credit it ought to be mentioned that she managed an oar quite as skilfully as Stanley, nor could he have had a better assistant. Mildred praised her highly.

They rowed to the bottom of the lake, and remained there for half an hour to look about them, but did not disembark.

As they lingered at this point, the beauty of the day seemed to increase, and the lake became so attractive that all the occupants of the boat were unwilling to return. Mildred said she should like to spend the whole day on the Mere, while Rose echoed the wish; and it is certain Georgette would have done so, had she dared.

The view of the mansion, as they returned, was greatly admired, and the boat was more than once stopped to enable its occupants to study the picture.

"It was on this side of the lake, but a little nearer the bank, that the beautiful Virginia Massey was drowned," said the squire. "I have no doubt you have seen her portrait at the hall. A lovely creature, and her death caused the greatest affliction to her friends, whose distress was heightened by the fact that she was close upon her wedding-day. Her intended

husband was with her at the time and made great, but ineffectual, efforts to save her."

"You say she was drowned in this part of the lake, sir?" said Rose.

"Not twenty yards from where we now are," replied the squire. "Pull a little towards the bank and you will come to the exact spot."

There was nothing to be seen, but Rose acted on the squire's suggestion, took two or three strokes with the oar and then ceased rowing.

Once more the spot was nearly proving fatal.

On reaching it she rose in her seat, and looked over the side of the boat. The squire got up at the same time, meaning to pull her back, but instead of doing so he pushed her overboard. Her fall into the lake caused the greatest terror among those in the boat, and loud cries arose from all.

The squire, who had tried to grasp her, failed in doing so, and only made matters worse, as he nearly upset the boat. Several hands were extended to the unlucky girl, but she could not reach one of them, and sank.

Not a moment was now to be lost and, jumping into the water, Stanley seized hold of her when she came to the surface and sustained her till she could be pulled into the boat by the squire and Georgette.

Stanley did not care to get in again, but laying hold of a rope, which the squire flung to him, soon brought the boat to the bank.

Notwithstanding the fright and immersion she had undergone, Rose did not seem much worse. She called out to thank Stanley for preserving her from the fate of Virginia Massey, and likewise warmly thanked the squire, but said nothing about his having accidentally pushed her overboard.

As soon as they reached the shore, Stanley urged her to run as fast as she could to the house and change her dress, and Mildred sent Georgette with her. As to Stanley, he did not mind his ducking—all he seemed to care for was his hat, which he thought was spoiled.

The squire took upon himself the entire blame of the accident.

"It was all my fault," he said, "and if that charming girl had shared the fate of Virginia Massey, I should never have forgiven myself."

"I was very much afraid she would have been drowned," said Mildred.

"I thought all was over with her and had begun to breathe a prayer for her soul, when Stanley leaped into the water and rescued her," said Sister Aline.

"After this accident I don't think I shall ever venture on the lake again," said Mildred.

The alarm had now been given at the house, and while they were still standing on the bank, several men-servants, including Glossop and Dominique, came hurrying down, as fast as they could, to express their anxiety and offer assistance.

They were followed, though not so quickly, by Lady Starkey, Lady Talmash, and Mrs. Brereton—all three looking greatly alarmed. The latter could scarcely be prevented from embracing her son, even by the dripping state of his apparel. Fearing he would take a severe cold if he remained as he was, she insisted on his returning immediately to the hall and putting on some dry clothes.

"Yes, yes, go at once," said the squire. "You have acted most imprudently in keeping on the wet things so long. I shall be blamed for it all."

"Most certainly you will, papa," said Mildred. "I hope the mischief is not already done."

"No, don't be uneasy," said Stanley. "I'll answer for myself."

And he set off to the hall as fast as he could and, having made the necessary change in his attire and put on another hat, rejoined the party on the lawn.

## IV.

A WINTER IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE PROPOSED  
FOR MILDRED.

THE occurrence on the Mere, in which Stanley played so conspicuous a part, seemed to afford him extreme satisfaction—and no wonder, since everybody, even the men-servants, regarded him as a sort of hero.

Soon afterwards, Rose herself appeared on the lawn, attended by Georgette. She had been provided with one of Mildred's morning dresses, and looked very well in it.

After thanking Stanley most warmly for the great services he had rendered her, she said, "I can never forget that you have saved my life."

"The reflection will always be most gratifying to me," he replied.

"Had he not rescued you I should never have felt happy again," said the squire; "since I was the cause of the accident. And I can assure you, my dear young lady, I felt a sharper pang than I have ever before experienced when you fell into the water."

"Pray think of it no more, sir," said Rose, "I know what you meant to do."

The day was so fine that the majority of the party remained on the lawn for some time longer. Mildred was the first to retire, and she took with her Sister Aline and Georgette.

A better understanding than had previously subsisted between Mildred and Rose seemed to have sprung up between

them, and when they separated they kissed each other affectionately.

"I hope I shall see you to-morrow," said Mildred, "if the day is fine. I shall certainly come here; but shall only admire the lake at a distance."

"My unexpected plunge has not at all alarmed me," said Rose, "and I should not object to another row to-morrow."

"Be prudent," said Stanley. "I may not always be at hand to help you."

"I must speak to papa, and tell him he will be responsible for any future mishap," said Mildred.

Rose laughed.

Mildred and those with her now entered the house and proceeded to their own rooms; while Rose and Stanley took possession of a bench, charmingly placed near a bed of roses.

Here let us leave them for a time, and visit another bench on the opposite side of the lawn, where we shall find Lady Starkey in the full enjoyment of a tête-à-tête with the squire.

"I am thinking of returning to town almost immediately," she said.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "I am very sorry to hear it. I hope it is not a sudden resolution."

"Not altogether sudden," she rejoined. "But I begin to think I have outstayed my welcome."

"Pray don't entertain any such notion," he replied. "I intend to give a garden party or two, and a dinner, almost immediately. I hope you will stay for them."

"I cannot positively promise," she replied; "but I won't leave before if I can help it. How things are changed!" she exclaimed, with a deep sigh. "At one time I persuaded myself that I should remain here altogether. I fancied you wished me to become mistress of Beaucliffe."

Somewhat embarrassed the squire did not exactly know what sort of answer to make.

"I thought you had quite changed your mind," he said.

"You could not have entertained such a poor opinion of me," she rejoined. "I was quite prepared to fulfil my engagement, and I expected you to fulfil yours."

"Difficulties I had not foreseen arose," said the squire—"insuperable difficulties."

"And these still exist, I suppose?" said Lady Starkey. "Let us come to a clear understanding."

"I fear so," he replied. "Nothing, I need scarcely say, could be more gratifying to me than a union with a person of your ladyship's distinction and accomplishments, but I am obliged to abandon the idea."

"Why so?" demanded Lady Starkey. "You have not been rejected by me."

"But you have assumed such a hostile form to my daughter and her husband that I fear a perfect reconciliation between you is impossible; and, without that, happiness could not be expected while living together in the same house, and constantly meeting. I have a suggestion to offer to your ladyship. Release me from my promise—which cannot be satisfactorily carried out—but remain here, with as much authority as you have hitherto enjoyed, as long as you think proper."

"Well, I consent," she replied. "I confess I am very comfortable here; but if I should become tired of the place I can run up to town at any time."

"Exactly," replied the squire, "and return when you think proper. From the present state of my dear child's health, I fear I may expect to lose her, and in that case there can be no obstacle—at least, on my part—to our union. Does this arrangement suit your ladyship?"

"Perfectly," she replied.

"Then let us take a walk round the lawn."

She delightedly acceded to the proposal.

Rose and Stanley still occupied the bench they had chosen. They looked graver than they did, for they were discussing the possibility of Lady Starkey's immediate return to town, in which case Rose would have to accompany her.

"I don't think my mother will consent to part with you," said Stanley. "Of late you have become quite necessary to her."

"I have tried to make myself useful," replied Rose. "But I really am fond of Mrs. Brereton, and no doubt she perceives it. I don't believe I shall ever be as happy again, as I have been at the old hall. I like it quite as well as Beacliffe—in some respects better."

"You are very kind to say so, but I should scarcely think that possible," he replied. "For instance, we have nothing at Brereton like this lovely lawn, or the Mere. It is strange that Mildred never could reconcile herself to the old house."

"Your mother says she took an early dislike to the place, and never tried to overcome it."

"I believe that's true. I should like to consult you about Mildred's health. My mother is seriously alarmed. What is your opinion?"

"My opinion is that she ought not to pass another winter in this rigorous climate. She must go to Nice, or some place in the South of France."

"Will you and Sister Aline accompany her?" asked Stanley, anxiously.

"I will go with her if she wishes it," replied Rose; "and I am quite sure Sister Aline is too devoted to her to leave her at such a critical juncture. I trust she may be restored to perfect health."

"I trust she may," echoed Stanley. "But I confess I am very doubtful. Still, the mild climate may work wonders. I am greatly obliged by your prompt compliance with my request."

"Depend upon it, I will do all I can," said Rose, earnestly. "I pity her exceedingly, and I love her as much as I pity her. If I can do nothing else, I can help to make her latter days happy."

"That is exactly what I desire," said Stanley, with a grateful look. "With you and Sister Aline to tend her, I feel that nothing will be wanting either in personal comfort or religious consolation. It is sad that she cannot pass her last hours in the house where she was born, and where she has always lived, but I believe this to be her only chance."

"I am sure it is," said Rose.

"I do not think she ever had a day's illness until she quitted her father's house, and returned almost in a dying state," said Stanley.

"What a change!" exclaimed Rose.

"At one time I suspected poison——"

"Poison!" exclaimed Rose.

"But I have since dismissed the injurious thought from my breast."

"You are right to do so," said Rose. "One person only could have committed the crime, and I believe him to be utterly incapable of it."

"I acquit him entirely," said Stanley. "I attribute her

sufferings entirely to remorse—the effect of which has been as terrible as that of poison itself.”

Rose made no reply, but her looks showed that she entertained the same opinion.

“It is from this conviction that I anticipate the difficulty of a perfect cure. It is a disease of the mind rather than the body, and hitherto all her penitence has proved unavailing.”

“I do not despair,” said Rose. “Tranquility of mind may be restored. She has looked much easier of late.”

Just then the squire and Lady Starkey came up.

“You don’t seem, from your looks, to be holding a very lively conversation,” said her ladyship.

“We are talking of dear Mildred,” replied Rose. “Stanley agrees with me that she must pass next winter in the South of France. I have promised to take charge of her, and we hope to prevail on Sister Aline to go with us.”

“I entirely approve of the plan,” said the squire. “It gives me the greatest possible pain to see her, as it were, dying by inches, and I hope you may be enabled to restore her to her former health. I don’t suppose she will object to go, but you must not make quite certain.”

“Of course, the decision will be left entirely to her,” said Stanley; “but I do not anticipate any difficulty. On the contrary, I think she will be greatly pleased by the proposition.”

“There is only one thing against it,” said the squire. “She told me she would never leave this house again.”

“When she knows we hope to restore her to health, she may think differently,” said Rose. “As I fully believe her life depends on the change, I urge it most strenuously.”

“If your opinion is confirmed, not a word can be said,” rejoined the squire.

“I have always heard that the shores of the Mediterranean offer a charming climate for invalids,” said Lady Starkey, “and I therefore must support my niece’s opinion.”

“Do you feel inclined to go to Nice for the winter, aunt?” asked Rose.

Lady Starkey looked at the squire.

“I should prefer Cannes or Mentone, from what I hear of them,” he said. “But I don’t think I shall leave Beaucliffe unless Mildred wishes to have me with her. You must stop and take care of the house for me,” he added to Lady Starkey.

"That I will, with pleasure," she rejoined.

"Well, if this arrangement should be carried out, let us hope it may be satisfactory to everybody, and above all, beneficial to Mildred," said Stanley. "Here comes Lady Talmash. Perhaps she may go with us. Your ladyship has come most *à propos*. Are you inclined to spend the winter at Nice? Because I intend to take Mildred there, and give her the advantage of the climate, and shall be delighted if you will join the party."

"I should really like it very much, and think the change would be serviceable to myself. If you and Mildred desire it, I will go with you."

"I am very glad to hear it, and shall hold you to the engagement," said Stanley. "I need scarcely tell you we shall live very quietly, and avoid all excitement, but you can do just as you like, dine at the *table d'hôte*, go to balls, concerts, card parties, and mix in all the dissipations of the place."

"Possibly I may. I shall not lay down any rule, but do what seems most agreeable at the time. On one thing you may rely, I shall not expect you constantly to attend on me."

"Had you intimated any such wish, I should have been obliged to excuse myself. Mildred will require all my care, and I mean to devote myself to her."

"I entirely approve of your resolution, and think it does you great credit. Under such circumstances as these, I shall be enchanted to form one of the party. Lady Starkey, I suppose, is not going with you?"

"No. Her ladyship prefers staying at Beacliffe, and will take care of the squire."

"Everything seems to be capitally arranged. I hope we shall be able to carry it out."

While thus conversing, they had gradually approached the house, and now entered the drawing-room through the open window.

## V.

MR. WARBURTON FORMALLY ANNOUNCES HIS INTENDED  
MARRIAGE WITH LADY STARKEY.

NEXT day, Mr. Warburton and Lady Starkey had a long tête-à-tête in the library, the result of which was a formal announcement on the part of the squire that the engagement he had entered into with her ladyship would be speedily carried out.

This announcement did not occasion much surprise, since the probability of the marriage had been discussed by everybody, but it seemed to give general satisfaction, for her ladyship was much liked, and Mrs. Twemlow, the housekeeper, Glossop, Dominique, and the two footmen, thought she would make a very good mistress.

Before coming to a decision, the squire had argued the matter with himself pretty much in this way.

"I don't think I can do better than marry her ladyship, who will do me credit in every respect. She is a most lady-like, charming woman, and will make Beaucliffe what it used to be in former days—a most attractive and agreeable house, I feel I am quite safe with her. That unfortunate elopement has done us great mischief. I cannot explain it to everybody, and the only way to set it right is to place an unmistakable lady at the head of the establishment. We shall all stand better when that is done. Besides, she has a clear three thousand a year, and that is not to be despised. On the whole, I think I ought to consider myself lucky; and I am chiefly fortunate in having gained a lady, who will sit so well at the head of my table. I fancy I see her there now. I

am very glad poor dear Mildred is going to Nice, as it will prevent any possibility of misunderstanding between her and the new mistress of the house, and I dare say the party can be induced to set out for the South of France some two or three months earlier."

These reflections were interrupted by the entrance of the lady herself into the library, and no sooner did she appear than the gallant squire hastened to meet her, and leading her to a sofa, sat down beside her.

"Your ladyship has had sufficient experience of Beaucliffe and its ways to know whether you are likely to be happy here. I will do all I can to make you so, and if devoted regard will content you, you shall have it. I should certainly never have taken another spouse, not even your ladyship—if Mildred's marriage had turned out well—because there would inevitably have been a certain rivalry between you which I could not have controlled. But now all will be pleasant, and my table will once more be graced by one who must command admiration and respect. I do not wish to flatter your ladyship, but the truth ought to be spoken. With regard to myself I will mention the sort of life I propose to lead. I shall live chiefly in the country, for the country suits me best, and I am used to it; and I shall keep a certain amount of company, and I think your ladyship won't object."

"Not in the least," she replied. "I shall like it."

"But though I shall endeavour to maintain the character I have acquired of a hearty country squire, I shall not object to run up to town occasionally, and I should be very sorry, indeed, if your ladyship were to let your house in Berkeley-square."

"I should never think of letting it without some special reason," she replied. "I am very fond of that house."

"Well, then, we quite understand each other, and as nobody will interfere with us I think we shall do very well."

"I'm sure we shall," she replied. "And now let me ask you a question. Do you wish our nuptials to take place here or in town?"

"I don't care," he replied. "But I should like them to be very quiet wherever they occur."

"Just my own feeling," replied her ladyship. "I could not bear a grand wedding, and I really believe all may be

managed more quietly in town than here. "Shall we go to St. George's?"

"Nothing can be done quietly there," replied the squire, laughing. "I picture to myself half the square full of splendid carriages, with any number of gorgeously attired lacqueys collected on the steps."

"Don't be alarmed," said her ladyship. "If we are married at St. George's, the business shall be very quietly conducted. That I promise you."

"Then I agree. But I couldn't stand a regular West-end wedding. I'm too old for it."

"Your taste shall be consulted," she rejoined. "I suppose you won't have a great *déjeuner*."

"What for?—if there will be so few guests to partake of it. But I leave all to you."

"In my opinion, the first thing to be settled," said Lady Starkey, "is the journey to Nice. "As soon as they are gone, there will be no more interference, and you can make any arrangements you think proper. Get them off as soon as you can. If the journey is delayed till the winter, something will occur to interfere with it, and it may never take place at all."

"I quite agree with your ladyship that it will be best for them to start as soon as they can, and I think this desirable object may be accomplished without any great difficulty. Let us see whether any of them are on the lawn."

On walking forth they found the whole party assembled there. To their great satisfaction Mildred and Sister Aline had expressed a strong desire to proceed to the shores of the Mediterranean without delay.

"If I go there immediately I may derive some benefit," said Mildred to Stanley, "but if I wait till the winter I believe it will be too late."

"At all events you can prolong your visit if you find the climate suits you," said Stanley. "It is quite clear you derive no real benefit from your stay here."

"I cannot perceive any improvement, I confess," said Sister Aline. "But the shores of the Mediterranean may really benefit her, and therefore ought to be tried."

"I am confident the climate will cure her," said Rose.

"I don't like to offer an opinion," said Lady Starkey,

"but I should think the late summer must be the best season for an invalid."

"Let there be no delay whatever," said the squire. "Since everybody fancies Nice, try it. If it suits you, remain there. If you don't improve after a fair trial—say two or three months—come back."

"Our preparations for early departure must immediately be made," said Stanley. "I should think you can all be ready in a week."

"In half that time," Rose replied.

While this conversation was going on the squire had looked anxiously at Mildred, and became apprehensive that her life would not be long, whatever benefit she might derive from a milder climate.

Greatly moved, he took her hand, and led her to some distance from the others.

"Tell me frankly, my dear child," he said. "You are certain that you desire this proposed journey to the South of France?"

"I like the notion of it exceedingly, dearest papa, and feel almost certain that I shall benefit by it. My chief fear is that my strength may not last."

Looking at her with indescribable tenderness, the squire said:

"If, instead of regaining strength, you become more feeble, do not remain there till it may be too late to move, but return—promise me that!"

"I promise it," she replied. "I would fain breathe my last at Beacliffe, and I will not put off my return here till it may be impossible."

Overcome by his feelings, Mr. Warburton remained silent for a few minutes, and then asked in broken accents:

"Is there anything you would have done during your absence?"

"I only wish you to see that my horses are cared for," she replied. "Never again shall I mount one of my favourite hunters—but I still love them as much as ever."

"Don't despair, my darling!" said the squire. "I scarcely dare hold out hopes, but I trust your strength may return, and that you may be able to ride as boldly as in former days."

"Never, dear papa, I do not expect it. But I do not wish my stables to be broken up."

"Rest easy about that. Not a single horse shall be sold or given away without your permission. But I ought to prepare you. When you come back you will find Beacliffe changed in some respects."

"There will be a new mistress of the house—ha!" she rejoined. "It cost me a pang at first. But I am now reconciled to it. You could not have chosen better."

"You really think so?"

"I do," she replied. "I fully believe Lady Starkey will make you happy, and I shall be happy to see you so."

"I believe the house will be more comfortable than it has been of late, for I need scarcely tell you it has been very unsettled."

"I know it—I know it—and I also know how valuable to you will be Lady Starkey's experience and management."

"Just my feeling," replied the squire. "But now to come back to your proposed journey to the South of France—I shall feel better satisfied if I have a good, sound, medical opinion as to the benefit to be derived from the change, and I shall therefore, send a telegraphic message to Dr. Baguley, of Chester, begging him to come over here to-morrow to meet Mr. Newton, our old surgeon, so that they may hold a consultation together on your case. What say you, darling?"

"You know the great dislike I have to be governed by medical opinions, papa."

"Yes, you have shown it by constantly refusing to see Mr. Newton, but you must submit now, or I may be blamed."

"Very well, send for the doctors, and I will see them; but I must state beforehand, that whatever they may say, I won't give up my proposed journey to Nice."

"Then you are bent upon going?"

"Quite determined, and I really think I shall be best out of the way for a few months, till you get certain affairs settled."

"Well, come back to the others," said the squire, "and I will go and send my telegram to Chester, and a mounted messenger to Mr. Newton."

## VI.

## A MEDICAL CONSULTATION AND ITS RESULT.

NEXT morning, at eleven o'clock. Dr. Baguley and Mr. Newton answered the summon they had received, and were ushered by Glossop into the library, where they found Mr. Warburton.

Both had a large country practice, and were men of considerable ability. Neither had seen Mrs. Stanley Brereton since her return to Beaucliffe, and there was something mysterious in her conduct that perplexed them.

"I wish to consult you, gentlemen, about my daughter, Mrs. Stanley Brereton," said the squire. "As you will see presently, she is in a very delicate state of health—consumption, I fear—and believes she would be much benefitted by passing a couple of months at Nice."

"I have no doubt of it," said Dr. Baguley. "But the proper season for Nice is the winter."

"I should recommend that her departure be delayed for two or three months," said Mr. Newton. "She will gain nothing. Our own climate just now is as good as the other."

"But she persuades herself that her only hope of recovery is in an immediate change," said the squire. "She believes she will not live till the winter if she remains."

"But the shores of the Mediterranean are not without danger," remarked Dr. Baguley. "The mistral frequently

prevails there at this time of the year, and that wind is very dangerous to invalids."

Just then the door was opened by the butler, and Mildred came in, accompanied by Stanley.

The two medical men, who were seated, immediately arose and advanced to meet her, both being extremely struck by her delicate appearance.

After regarding her for a few minutes, they consulted each other by a look, the result of which was not very favourable to the invalid. Dr. Baguley likewise felt her pulse, and shook his head.

"You will do better where you are than by going to Nice," he remarked.

"Decidedly," said Mr. Newton. "I recommend you to keep quiet."

"But my wife believes that her life may be saved by a visit to Nice," said Stanley.

"I do," she said. "And I am certain I am doomed if I remain here."

"You are mistaken," said Dr. Baguley. "I could not advise you to go to Nice now—nor could Mr. Newton."

"Certainly not," replied the other.

"But I mean to go, whatever may be the consequences," said Mildred.

"You must not permit your wife to sacrifice herself thus, sir," said Mr. Newton.

"I really cannot help it, gentlemen," rejoined Stanley. "She is determined to go, and I think opposition may do more harm than good."

"Of course a great deal will depend upon the weather," remarked Dr. Baguley. "If it happens to be favourable, she may do very well, but my chief fear is from the dry north-west wind—or mistral—should that prevail. There are several very able physicians at Nice, so you are always sure of good advice."

"I am very glad to hear that," replied the squire.

"Have you any further questions to ask me, gentlemen?" said Mildred. "If not, I will retire."

"No, there is no need to detain you, madam," replied Mr. Newton, gravely. "We have all the information we require, and Dr. Baguley and myself will consult together before our

departure, and write out a few prescriptions which we will leave with your husband."

"We need not advise you to be very careful," said Dr. Baguley. "Your life depends upon your care."

Mildred then quitted the room, attended by Stanley, who returned in a few minutes, and found the two medical men seated at a writing-table, engaged in deep consultation, and looking very grave.

"I very much doubt whether you will be able to bring your wife back alive to England, Mr. Brereton," said Dr. Baguley, giving him three or four prescriptions, which he had placed in the envelope. "Her case is a peculiar one, and I am afraid it is already too far advanced to be checked. But she may be soothed, and that is important. We will see her again before her departure."

"Pray do so," said Stanley. "We shall not start for a week, and you can pay her a couple more visits during that interval, so as to ascertain how she goes on."

"We will come again on the day after to-morrow, and at the same time," said Mr. Newton.

They then took leave, and the servants in attendance were struck by their grave expression, as they proceeded to their carriages.

When Mildred returned to her own room, she found Sister Aline and Rose waiting for her.

"What has been decided on?" said Rose eagerly.

"They have given a very reluctant assent to my departure to Nice," replied Mildred.

"That I fully expected. They wanted to keep you here."

"But what do they think of your case?" asked Sister Aline.

"Very badly, I believe," replied Mildred. "They scarcely gave me any hopes."

"Never mind! Keep up your spirits!" cried Rose. "I believe you will disappoint them both."

"I have very poor hopes of recovery," said Mildred. "I felt so ill just now, when I was under examination by the medical men, that I thought I should have died. They may come again, but I won't see them."

"Why not?" asked Rose. "I'm sure they would cure you, if they could."

"Perhaps so," rejoined Mildred. "But they cannot."

Just then, Stanley entered the room.

"I want you to take a short walk with me in the garden," he said.

"It must be a very short walk," she replied, "for I have not much strength left."

Taking his arm, she descended the back stairs, and went with him into the garden.

Evidently he had something important to say to her, but he hesitated to say it.

"I am going to ask you a very serious question," he said. "Forgive me if I am wrong, but it is important I should know the exact truth. Something I overheard said by the medical men just now awakened suspicions which I myself once entertained."

She became as pale as death, and trembled in every limb.

"Let us sit down," he rejoined. "Your strength is failing you."

He led her to a bench as quickly as he could. As soon as she was seated she caught hold of his arm, and looking as if she would penetrate to his soul, said:

"Now tell me what you suspected."

Stanley answered in a low, but distinct voice:

"Forgive me, if I was wrong. But I suspected you had taken poison—or, rather, I thought that poison had been given you—slow poison. I afterwards dismissed this opinion, but it has just been revived by the remarks of the medical men."

"What did they say?" she asked.

"These were Dr. Baguley's exact words," replied Stanley:

"I am convinced she is suffering from the effects of slow poison.' 'It looks like it, I own,' replied the other. 'But it cannot possibly be.'"

"Doctor Baguley was right," said Mildred, in tones of the deepest remorse. "I *am* suffering from the effects of poison—poison self-administered—but it failed in its object, and has left me, as you see, to a miserable existence."

"Gracious Heaven! Is it possible?" exclaimed Stanley, with a deep groan.

Mildred made no reply—her senses forsook her, and she fell back, utterly unconscious, on the bench.

Stanley did not call for assistance, nor did he attempt to restore her, but watched by her side for nearly half an hour, when she revived.

At first she was greatly confused, but she soon recovered sufficiently to be able to re-enter the house with her husband's support, and was delivered over by him to Sister Aline's tender care.

## VII.

## ANOTHER MEDICAL CONSULTATION.

ACCORDING to appointment, on the second day after their visit, Dr. Baguley and Mr. Newton came again to Beaucliffe, and were received by Stanley in the library.

After the butler had left the room, Stanley, who had not answered their inquiries as to his wife's health very satisfactorily, said, "I have now an explanation to give you, gentlemen, in reference to her case, with which I could not furnish you on the previous occasion, as I was wholly unacquainted with it myself. As I am sure you will not desire me to enter into any needless details I will only remind you that my wife eloped with Captain Darcy, and being subsequently struck with remorse at the step taken, returned to her father's house, and was most kindly received by him. Subsequently, a meeting took place at Dieppe between Darcy and myself, whereat my injured honour was fully avenged, and I learned at the same time that my unhappy wife was not so guilty as I supposed."

No remark was made by the medical men, and after a momentary pause Stanley went on.

"Even since her return the fugitive had been suffering in her health and was almost in a dying state, but this seemed accounted for by the severe mental anguish she endured, and she positively refused all medical aid. At one time, I confess, I suspected she had taken poison, but I afterwards changed my opinion."

"You were right nevertheless," remarked Dr. Baguley.

"Mr. Newton and myself are agreed in opinion on that point, and we fear that although the drug was not potent enough to kill, it has produced a permanently injurious effect upon the system."

"After your departure the other day," said Stanley, "my former suspicions revived, and I resolved to ascertain the truth. I therefore questioned her directly as to the point, and she confessed that goaded by remorse at her conduct, she had taken poison, but the dose was not sufficient to do its work effectually."

"I felt sure I could not be mistaken," said Dr. Baguley. "The moment I looked at her, I saw the effects of a slow poison in her countenance. I am afraid, Mr. Brereton, she will never be cured."

"She does not expect it herself, sir," replied Stanley. "Her sole anxiety is that her secret should not become known to her father, as she would not inflict further pain upon him. I must therefore beg you to be careful."

Both gave him an assurance to that effect.

"I sincerely pity you, Mr. Brereton," said Dr. Baguley, "but I pity your excellent father-in-law still more. Never was man prouder of his daughter. Deeming her perfection, he must have been dreadfully mortified by her elopement, and were he now to learn that she has finished the affair by taking poison, I know not what would not happen to him. But we must hear the truth from her own lips, in order to certify it if needful."

"You shall," replied Stanley. "I will bring her to you presently."

On quitting the room, his first step was to direct Glossop to prevent the squire from coming in till the examination was over.

He then went in search of Mildred, and returned with her immediately.

Both medical men regarded her compassionately as she entered the library.

She had now quite recovered her self-possession, and declared that at a time of great excitement she had swallowed the contents of a small phial, which had been procured for her as poison, but which had failed in its effect, though it had gradually destroyed her health.

A memorandum of this confession was made by Dr. Baguley, which she signed,

As soon as this was done, the doctors said they felt very greatly for her distress, and would not detain her a moment longer than necessary.

Thanking them deeply for their consideration, she withdrew immediately with her husband.

## VIII.

## N I C E .

THE party did not travel very expeditiously, and more than a week elapsed before they arrived at Nice.

A complete suite of rooms had been ordered for them at the Victoria—a large, modern hotel, charmingly situated on the beach, at the west end of the town, and commanding a superb view of the blue and sparkling Mediterranean.

Enchanted with the place, which, with its parades, public buildings, gardens and gay shops, more than realised any notions she had formed of it, Mildred felt quite exhilarated; and tried to persuade herself that her journey south had already done her a world of good. She told Sister Aline and Georgette, who were constantly with her, that she felt certain she should be quite well in a month. Whatever they thought they did not contradict her.

The heat was greater than she expected, it is true; but the sun's fiercest rays were carefully excluded, and towards evening there was a cool and most refreshing sea-breeze, which was allowed full admittance.

The whole suite of rooms belonging to the party looked upon the Mediterranean, and comprehended a charming salon, where all could meet.

Georgette, who was required to be always at hand, had a small room, communicating with her mistress's chamber, and Sister Aline was placed in an adjoining apartment. Lady Talmash and Rose had most agreeable rooms. They dined with Stanley at the table d'hôte, which was admirably

served, but the others preferred the privacy of their own salon.

The arrival of the party had caused somewhat of a sensation among the guests, and much curiosity was manifested to see them at the dinner.

Both ladies were greatly admired, and several young men contrived to be presented to them; but they retired early.

Next day, Dr. Travis, an eminent physician of Nice, called on Mildred, in compliance with an appointment made by Stanley, and seemed to take a hopeful view of her case, but recommended great care.

Subsequently she walked out with Stanley, attended by Sister Aline and Georgette, and visited the Jardin Public and the Corso.

While they were thus occupied, Lady Talmash and Rose sought the parade leading to the port, and were joined by some of the acquaintances they had formed overnight.

Rose was a good deal annoyed by the pertinacity with which these idlers followed them about, but Lady Talmash—to the surprise of her companion—seemed to give them great encouragement.

Later on, the two parties met at the Café Américain on the Corso, where capitalices were served, and where all the visitors were anxious to obtain a glimpse of Mildred and Sister Aline, about whom there seemed something extremely mysterious.

Gladly would Stanley have shaken off the crowd of admirers that Lady Talmash had gathered round her, but he found it impossible. However, he privately counselled Rose to join his wife, and she did so.

Though she could not enter into its gaities, Mildred was enchanted with Nice, and congratulated herself on having come there. The climate seemed to suit her, and her spirits were decidedly better. She could not take sea-baths, but she could inhale sea-breezes, and they did her an immense deal of good. She rejected everything she had heard to the disadvantage of Nice, and thought only of its charms.

She had now been there more than a fortnight, and had discovered some new beauty every day. No mistral had blown since her arrival, only the softest breezes, that scarcely ruffled the surface of the placid sea. She could look out for ever upon it, and on the bustling port that afforded her endless

amusement, and was only compelled by the unsupportable heat to shut out the view.

She could not have had a better attendant than Georgette, who enjoyed Nice as much as herself—even more, perhaps—for she not only gazed at the blue Mediterranean, but plunged into it every morning. The devoted soubrette declared that she had never known the real pleasure of bathing till she came to Nice.

Sister Aline did not bathe, but she was charmed by the sea view, and the climate suited her, so that she had no complaint to make. She constantly spoke to Dr. Travis about his patient, but could elicit no decided opinion from him, except that he seemed to think her slightly improving.

All the ladies, including Georgette, had been to the Place St. Dominique to provide themselves with the straw hats for which *Tori et Fils* are famous, and which enabled them to resist the sun's rays.

During the period we have referred to, Lady Talmash and Rose had familiarised themselves with all the attractions of the place. Each morn, at a very early hour, they dipped in the Mediterranean, to the great improvement of their health and complexion, and Stanley followed their example.

But there is plenty to be seen at Nice, and it was not neglected.

The cathedral was visited, the Promenade des Anglais, the Pouchettes, the quay near the Croix de Marbre, the promenades, the squares, the shops, the gardens. Nothing was omitted.

Stanley, and the ladies under his charge, dined regularly at the table d'hôte. Rose formed as few new acquaintances as she could help, but still their number constantly increased, and she now seemed to know a great many pleasant people.

Lady Talmash had a particular friend, whose attention to her became so marked and exclusive that he had driven all other suitors away.

Influenced by some report he had heard, Stanley thought it necessary to caution her ladyship against her admirer, but she turned a deaf ear to his warnings.

The gentleman in question, Mr. Charles Kynaston, belonged to a very good Yorkshire family, being the younger

brother of a baronet, and was reported to have a thousand a year, if not more. Remarkably handsome, with very gentleman-like and prepossessing manners, about thirty, he had many good points in his favour.

But he had one fault, that counterbalanced all his merits—he was strongly addicted to play. Moreover, it was asserted that he had lost considerably.

Under these circumstances, Stanley had deemed it his duty to caution Lady Talmash—but his counsel, as we have said, was not very well received.

It is quite certain that Charles Kynaston was informed of Stanley's officious conduct, but instead of resenting it he became more friendly with him than before.

He complained of his ill-luck, frankly confessed that he had gone further than he ought, and declared he would never play so deeply again.

What could he do more? Stanley fully believed him, and they became great friends.

Another week went by, during which Charles Kynaston became more devoted than ever to Lady Talmash, but Stanley began to fear—from stories that were told him—that he did not keep his promise to abstain from play so strictly as he ought to have done.

## IX.

## CHARLES KYNASTON.

THE next thing Stanley heard was, that Charles Kynaston, who seemed to have been meditating some *coup*, had gone to Mentone. Lady Talmash was visibly depressed by his departure, though he had positively assured her he should return in a few days.

Stanley was told that the real motive of his visit to Mentone was to repair his fortunes at the gaming tables there, and on receiving this information he immediately sought an interview with her ladyship.

She looked dreadfully depressed, and scarcely answered Stanley's inquiries.

"I don't understand why he should go to Mentone," observed Stanley. "If he must play, why couldn't he remain here?"

"Because he wished to meet a fresh set," replied Lady Talmash. "Besides, I dare say he had other motives."

"I quite relied upon his promise to play no more," said Stanley, "but I believe he has broken it, and now I find he has moved off to new ground. Dear Lady Talmash, you really must give him up. He is an incorrigible gambler."

"I know it," she replied, in an agony of distress. "But I cannot give him up."

"Cannot give him up;—why not?" said Stanley, regarding her in astonishment.

"I know you will blame me when I tell you—very properly so——"

"Never mind. What have you done?"

"I have lent him a large sum of money—a very large sum of money—and I cannot get rid of him till he pays me."

"Great Heavens! Did I hear aright?" cried Stanley, in increased surprise. "How much *have* you lent him?"

"After some hesitation, she said, "Two thousand pounds."

"What!" exclaimed Stanley, "you have lent this gambler and adventurer two thousand pounds? I would not have believed you capable of such imprudence unless your ladyship had told me so yourself. You will never get back a shilling of the money."

"I fear not," she gasped. "As soon as the money arrived from my London bankers, I handed it over to Charles, and he swore to repay me within three days. This is the third day. I fear it will all be lost at the gaming tables at Mentone."

"I fear so too. I wish your ladyship had consulted me. I would have advised you to act very differently. Still there may be a hope of recovery. You are not certain he has lost the money?"

"No, but I have a strong presentiment of it. Had he been lucky, he would assuredly have let me know."

"But there is a possibility that he might have won."

"Yes, there is just a chance. But it is so slight that I have no belief in it."

"Dear Lady Talmash," said Stanley, "would you like me to go to Mentone as your representative, and try and force him to give up the money? If you desire it, I will."

Lady Talmash, however, did not seem inclined to resort to this extreme measure, and declined to give Stanley sufficient authority to demand the money, so that he hesitated to undertake the errand.

While they were giving the matter further consideration, Charles Kynaston himself entered the room, his joyous aspect showing he had been lucky.

Rushing up to Lady Talmash, he threw himself at her feet, and offering her a small portefeuille, said, "In that pocket-book your ladyship will find bills and notes to the amount you have lent me. Never was I happier than I am in being able to return the money to you. Take it, pray take it."

But Lady Talmash was quite overcome by emotion, and could not comply.

"Don't disappoint him!" said Stanley. "Sir, I applaud your honourable purpose," he added to Charles Kynaston.

"Open the pocket-book, I beg of you, Mr. Brereton," said Kynaston, rising and turning to him, "and satisfy yourself that it really contains the amount I have stated."

"I will take your word for it, Mr. Kynaston," replied Stanley. "I am quite sure it does."

"Give it me, then," cried Lady Talmash, taking the portefeuille; "and accept my very best thanks."

"Nay, thanks are due from me," said Kynaston, earnestly. "You have indeed greatly served me, and obliged me in a manner I shall never forget."

"And you have behaved in a most honourable manner, Charles," said Lady Talmash; "and have quite restored yourself to my good opinion."

"And mine," added Stanley.

"I am rejoiced to hear it," said Kynaston. "I always meant to act honourably. Fortune, at last, has favoured me. I have won three thousand pounds—two-thirds of which I have returned to you. And now hear what I have to say further. Never again will I touch card or dice—never! This I solemnly swear!"

Both looked at him as he uttered the vow, and felt sure he was in earnest.

"Keep that vow, and you will do well," said Stanley.

"You make me feel quite happy," said Lady Talmash.

Reports of Charles Kynaston's extraordinary good luck soon reached the salons at Nice, and warm congratulations were offered him, for he was generally liked; but persons thought he would not keep the money long, and told him so.

"Oh! yes, I shall," he replied. "I have given up play."

"Since when?" they asked, incredulously.

"Since my return from Mentone," he replied.

People laughed at this assertion, and nobody believed it. But it proved correct.

## X.

SIR RANDAL DE BLUNDEVILLE AND MARSTON MALPAS  
ARRIVE AT NICE.

ABOUT this time, two of our former acquaintances, Sir Randal de Blundeville and Mr. Marston Malpas, arrived at Nice and took up their quarters at the Victoria

They had been making a tour in Switzerland and the North of Italy, and hearing that Stanley and his party were staying at Nice they resolved to make a halt there.

Owing to a variety of circumstances, Stanley had not seen so much of Sir Randal as he desired, and was very glad to meet him again.

Sir Randal's stately manner was well calculated to produce an impression upon the visitors at the hotel, and his appearance at the table d'hôte caused many inquiries to be made about him and his gay friend, which were answered in a very satisfactory manner by Stanley. As an old friend of Lady Talmash, he sat near her on the day of his arrival, and paid her a great deal of attention, while Marston Malpas, who beheld Rose for the first time, was quite captivated by her.

Sir Randal made many anxious inquiries about Mrs. Stanley Brereton, and was much concerned to learn the precarious state of her health from Lady Talmash.

"She is certainly better than when we left Beaucliffe," said her ladyship; "but I do not think her entirely out of danger. However, you will, no doubt, see her to-morrow, and will be able to judge for yourself."

"I sincerely pity my worthy friend, Mr. Warburton," said Sir Randal. "The daughter, whom he doated on, has been nothing but a source of the greatest anxiety to him."

"Quite true, Sir Randal," replied her ladyship; "and no one knows what he has gone through better than myself."

"By-the-by, the last piece of news I heard respecting him was that he was about to marry Lady Starkey," said Sir Randal. "Is it true?"

"Perfectly true, and the marriage may take place any time, for they won't wait for our return."

"Surprising! I could not have believed it. But perhaps, under the circumstances, it was the best thing he could do."

"Decidedly," said Lady Talmash. "He was almost heart-broken. Lady Starkey will make him a capital wife, and keep up Beaucliffe properly. I consider Mr. Warburton very lucky. Few elderly gentlemen have such a chance."

"Well, he deserves his good fortune, for he is a most excellent fellow," said Sir Randal.

While this conversation was going on, a very lively discourse took place between Marston Malpas and Rose. Thinking what he said would be agreeable to Stanley, the young gentleman told him how much he was struck by Rose's beauty, and how fortunate he esteemed himself in meeting her.

Stanley laughed, but was not altogether pleased—particularly when he perceived that Rose did not seem entirely indifferent to Malpas's attentions.

"What do you think of your neighbour," he said to her, as they left the *salle-à-manger*.

"I think him very agreeable," she replied. "I am delighted that he and Sir Randal have come here."

"I thought you had plenty of society?"

"But these are both very agreeable people," she replied. "Everybody seemed struck by Sir Randal, and I really think Mr. Marston Malpas a great acquisition."

"I see nothing in him," said Stanley, in a disparaging tone.

"Surely you must admit that he talks very agreeably. I have promised him a place next me at dinner to-morrow."

"You have!"

"Don't blame me; I couldn't very well refuse."

Next morning Sir Randal sought an interview with Mildred, and was quite shocked by the great change in her appearance. He could scarcely believe it was the lovely girl he had formerly known, and not without difficulty repressed his feelings.

"You find me much changed, I perceive," she said. "Nay, do not attempt to deny it; your looks confess the truth."

"You certainly do not look so well as when I last saw you at Beaucliffe," he replied. "But I understand you are much better since you came to Nice?"

"Yes," she replied. "I don't think I should be alive had I remained at home. But I have now some hopes of recovery."

"You have every opportunity that a salubrious place and fine climate can offer you. Ah! when I think how beautiful you were, and how full of health, I can scarcely believe in the change!"

"It is all my own fault, dear Sir Randal," she replied. "You have seen me on horseback with the hounds, you have seen me engaged at lawn tennis, and at other games, and know that my health and spirits were good. But I took no care of myself—none whatever—and have suffered in consequence."

"I won't blame you, my dear lady," he replied, "but I am sincerely sorry, for you deserve a better fate."

"Don't frighten her, Sir Randal," said Stanley. "Our physician, who is a very able man, assures me she will recover. You should have seen her when she first came here."

"I saw her a year ago. I saw her when she was Mildred Warburton, the loveliest girl in Cheshire, ay, in England, and I cannot help contrasting her present appearance with her former charming looks."

"That is scarcely fair, Sir Randal," said Mildred.

"At all events, it shows the strong impression you produced upon me," he replied. "And I hope to see you completely restored to your former beauty."

"In my opinion, there is more real interest in your present delicate looks than in your former dazzling beauty," said Stanley.

A gentle smile, that lighted up her pallid features, thanked him for the compliment.

"Well, you have a blooming beauty in your party," said Sir Randal. "She is aptly named Rose. My young friend, Marston Malpas, has quite lost his heart to her."

"Rose Hylton is a very amiable, as well as a very pretty girl," said Mildred. "I suppose you are aware she is Lady Starkey's niece, Sir Randal?"

"Yes, I have heard so."

"She deserves a good husband," continued Mildred. "She has no particular fortune of her own, but her aunt means to give her a handsome marriage portion."

"Should young Malpas propose to her, as I think he will," said Sir Randal, "a marriage portion will not be required, since he is very well off."

"But it can do no harm, and will make Rose feel more independent," said Mildred.

"You are speculating on what may never take place," said Stanley. "Mr. Malpas only met the young lady at the table d'hôte yesterday."

"But he was quite smitten, as I have told you," said Sir Randal. "He spoke of the young lady to me in most rapturous terms, and is now in attendance upon her and Lady Talmash in the public promenades. I believe something will come of it."

"I sincerely hope it may," said Mildred. "She is really a very nice girl. Why, here they are, I declare, on their return from the walk!" she added, as Lady Talmash and Rose, attended by Charles Kynaston and Marston Malpas, entered the salon.

The whole party seemed in high spirits, especially Rose.

"Well, have you had a pleasant promenade?" inquired Mildred.

"Delightful," replied Rose. "I never enjoyed anything so much."

"I had no idea Nice was such an enchanting place," said Malpas. "We have seen nothing like it on our tour."

"Come, that's rather strong," said Sir Randal. "But you have had agreeable society, and that accounts for it."

"Yes, there may be something in that," said Malpas, with a glance at Rose.

Malpas, who had not yet been presented to Mildred, was now made known to her, and very graciously received. But Stanley treated him rather haughtily. Lady Talmash took the opportunity of introducing Charles Kynaston to Sir Randal, and the formal old baronet, who knew his brother Sir Mowbray, received him very cordially.

An animated conversation ensued, in which everybody took part except Stanley, who was at length aroused from his seeming apathy by a telegraph message from England, brought him by one of the attendants.

"This is news in which most of us are interested," he said, after perusing the despatch, "so I will communicate it to you without delay."

"I can guess the news before you read it," said Lady Talmash. "It is to announce the approaching marriage of Lady Starkey with Mr. Warburton."

"The nuptials took place yesterday at Beacliffe, and quite privately," replied Stanley.

"The happy pair have my best wishes," said Lady Talmash.

"And mine," cried Sir Randal. "I repeat what I have often said, that a better fellow does not exist than the squire, and I sincerely wish him all happiness."

"I am delighted to hear you speak of dear papa in such terms, Sir Randal," said Mildred. "I feel quite certain Lady Starkey will make him happy."

"And so am I," said Rose, "I only wish I could congratulate them both in person."

"I ought to have told you," said Stanley, "that the telegram I have just received is from my mother. No one, it seems, was present on the occasion but herself and Sir John Lambert."

"I always understood that Mr. Warburton was quite resolved that the wedding should be strictly private, whether it took place at St. George's, Hanover-square, as Lady Starkey desired, or at Beacliffe," said Lady Talmash. "Sir John Lambert is Lady Starkey's oldest and best friend."

"And a better friend she could not have," said Sir Randal. "I am very glad he was present on the occasion. Would I had been there myself!"

"You ought to have been, dear Sir Randal," said Mildred, regarding him affectionately. "But I suppose papa knew you were on the Continent?"

"Very likely," said Sir Randal. "But though the hospitable squire gave no sumptuous wedding breakfast, I'll be bound he provided a most liberal entertainment to his tenants and retainers."

"You are right, Sir Randal," said Stanley. "My telegram informs me that he did so."

Soon after this the whole of the party went out for a walk—most of them proceeding to the Corso—while Stanley and his wife, attended by Sister Aline and Georgette, found their way to the Jardin Public.

## XI.

## THE COMTE DE CLAIRVAUX ARRIVES AT NICE.

NEXT day, the party at the Victoria received a fresh and very welcome addition in the Comte de Clairvaux, who came from Mentone, where he had been staying with a friend at a beautiful villa near the sea.

The comte had heard that Stanley was at Nice, and very soon found him out, and engaged rooms at the same hotel. Of course, he was presented to Mildred by her husband, and like every one else, who beheld her for the first time, he was struck by the extreme delicacy of her appearance, and thought her in a rapid decline.

But the person who interested the comte most, and whom he had not expected to meet, was Sister Aline. Almost immediately on his arrival he met Georgette, and learning from her that her former mistress was an inmate of the hotel, he sent word that he would pay her an early visit.

Sister Aline was very glad to see the comte, and displayed more cheerfulness than usual.

"I did not expect to find you here, dear sister," he said. "I thought you rarely quitted the religious retreat at Dieppe."

"I came to attend poor Mrs. Stanley Brereton, for whom I have the greatest affection, and who is here for the benefit of her health," she replied.

"I have just seen her," replied the comte, shaking his head, "and frankly confess I despair of her recovery."

"She is certainly better than when she left Beaucliffe. Heaven grant her restoration may be complete."

The comte did not attempt to offer much encouragement,

but inquired if there were any of his friends among the party.

"There is Lady Talmash, who is thought very charming," said Sister Aline, "and Rose Hylton, who is unquestionably very pretty. Amongst the gentlemen, there is Sir Randal de Blundeville, a friend of poor Sir Thomas Starkey, whom I am certain you will like."

"I already know him, and like him much," replied the comte. "He is a very distinguished person."

"There are others, but it is not necessary to mention them," said Sister Aline.

"Sir Randal will suffice," replied the comte, rising to depart. "With your permission, and if I shall not interrupt your devotions, I will pay you a short daily visit."

"I shall be very glad to see you," she replied.

And the comte quitted the room.

As he descended to the large morning room, he found Sir Randal, who had heard of his arrival, and was delighted to meet him.

"How fortunate I am in finding you here, Sir Randal," he said.

"No more fortunate than I am in meeting you, comte," replied the other. "I hope we shall be able to offer you some amusement."

"No doubt of it," replied the comte. "The place seems very gay. I have already met several friends since my arrival, and am pretty certain to meet many more."

"You cannot fail. The Comte de Clairvaux is popular everywhere."

"You are excessively obliging, Sir Randal," replied the other, bowing.

While they were thus conversing, Lady Talmash and Rose, evidently prepared for a walk, entered the salon, and the comte was presented to them. He thought both very good-looking, but was particularly pleased with Lady Talmash, and immediately devoted himself to her.

"With your permission I will attend you in your walk," he said.

"Nothing will afford us greater pleasure," replied her ladyship, charmed with his manner, and delighted with the opportunity of showing him off.

Accordingly, they proceeded to the parade, the comte placing himself in attendance upon her ladyship, who had not miscalculated the effect she was likely to produce when thus escorted. There was something in the Comte de Clairvaux's high-bred manner that proclaimed him a person of distinction, and many eyes followed him as he moved slowly along with his brilliant companion.

Nor was Sir Randal's stately deportment less effective in its way, though totally different, and unmistakably English. The contrast between the two gentlemen was very striking, and could not fail to attract attention, and Rose had as much reason to be vain of the complimentary remarks she overheard as her charming friend.

They were followed at some distance by Charles Kynaston and Marston Malpas, who did not like to join them, not feeling sure they should be welcome, but who witnessed the sensation produced, and heard some of the compliments paid them.

But ere long a meeting took place between the great personages who marched first, and Stanley and his wife, who were returning from a short walk, which Mildred had greatly enjoyed.

During this halt the "*belle poitrine*," as she was styled by the beholders, was as much admired as her blooming friends, and the greatest interest was expressed for her.

## XII.

## MR. WARBURTON AND LADY STARKEY ARRIVE AT NICE.

THE great attention paid by the Comte de Clairvaux to Lady Talmash, and the preference shown by her ladyship for the comte's society, could not fail to excite Charles Kynaston's jealousy; and when the same thing went on next day, he thought himself justified in remonstrating with her. But he did so with great good humour.

"You are so monopolised by this gallant Frenchman that I have scarcely an opportunity of speaking to you now," he said. "He walks about with you all day—sits next you at the table d'hôte—conducts you to the Salle de Conversation, and never thinks of leaving you for the rest of the day. The same thing goes on in the evening, and I find he has taken a box for you and Rose at the opera to-night."

"You cannot complain of that," she interrupted, "since you yourself have a seat."

"I would rather not be obliged to him," he rejoined.

"Nonsense!" she cried. "All the other gentlemen are going. This is only the comte's gallantry."

"He is too attentive by half. My friends laugh at me. Even Stanley Brereton tells me I am clearly cut out."

"Never mind what Stanley says. You know better. But don't exhibit yourself in this absurd character. I've the greatest horror of a jealous man. Besides, you've no cause for jealousy. It's pleasant, don't you see, to be attended upon by a man of distinction like the Comte de Clairvaux."

"Since you say so, that's quite enough," he rejoined. "You shan't hear any further complaints from me."

So the whole of the party went to the *Théâtre Italien* that evening, as arranged. Lady Talmash and Rose sat in front, and were objects of general admiration. The comte and Sir Randal were behind them, and the rest of the gentlemen occupied the back of the box. Both Charles Kynaston and Marston Malpas wished to come forward, but were not allowed.

On the following evening, the same party attended a concert at the *Cercle de la Méditerranée*, for which Sir Randal provided tickets; and on the third night, they all appeared at a ball at the same *Cercle*, which turned out a very brilliant affair.

It was scarcely to be expected that the Comte de Clairvaux would dance, but he yielded to Lady Talmash's persuasions, and stood up with her in a quadrille—Stanley with Rose for a partner, forming their *vis-à-vis*. We ought to mention that the two ladies were allowed to be the belles of the room.

Of course, Mildred would not appear on any of those occasions; but her compulsory absence was no deprivation, for she had quite lost her taste for amusement and gaiety, and never went out in the evening, except for a short walk.

At this juncture she was quite unable to do so for the mistral prevailed, and she had already felt its dire effects. Dr. Travis was in constant attendance upon her, and Sister Aline and Georgette took it in turns to watch by her couch at night, so that she was never left alone.

Heaven seemed to listen to the heartfelt prayers of the devoted friend who knelt beside her, for in the course of a week a decided change took place for the better, and as this baneful mistral had ceased to blow, her physician allowed her to venture forth again.

No persons were more rejoiced to behold her once more on the parade than Sir Randal and the Comte de Clairvaux.

As soon as he was satisfied that Mildred was out of danger Stanley telegraphed the good news to her father, and received a prompt response, showing how much the warm-hearted old gentleman was pleased by the joyful intelligence.

Lady Starkey—for she chose to retain her former title—wrote at the same time to Rose and Lady Talmash to say that if Mildred had a relapse, they would start for Nice at once,

as Mr. Warburton would never feel happy again if he did not embrace his daughter once more.

Answers were immediately sent, calculated to allay the old gentleman's fears, but having seriously contemplated the journey, he resolved to carry it out, and her ladyship prepared to accompany him. However, he resolved not to mention his design beforehand, but to take them by surprise.

One fine day, about a week after Mildred's restoration, a *chaise de poste* arrived at the Victoria, the two occupants of which were attended by a courier and a lady's-maid. The former, who appeared to act as valet, made some inquiries about rooms, which were immediately and satisfactorily answered.

A robust elderly gentleman, whose appearance proclaimed him an Englishman, descended from the voiture, and had scarcely set foot on the ground, when a cry of delight was heard, and a lady rushed forward, and flung her arms round his neck.

Mildred, who had been standing at the entrance of the hotel with her husband, had discovered her father. At the same moment, Stanley had been made aware of Lady Starkey's arrival, and hastened to greet her.

When Mr. Warburton perceived the sudden change in his daughter's looks he regretted he had taken her by surprise. But, fortunately, no harm was done, and they quickly entered the hotel, where they could converse in private.

Lady Starkey then explained that they had accomplished the long journey very satisfactorily, and had seen a great deal. They had travelled from Paris to Marseilles by rail and performed the latter part of the journey by post. It might have been accomplished more expeditiously but not more agreeably. Mr. Warburton could scarcely find words to express his delight in beholding his daughter again, and left the talking to Lady Starkey, but it could be seen that he was deeply moved. The meeting was not interrupted, and half an hour flew by before Stanley went in quest of Lady Talmash and Rose, who were filled with pleasurable surprise.

Altogether, the meeting was a most joyful one, and made the new-comers ample amends for their long and somewhat fatiguing journey.

The squire was also much gratified to find his old friend

Sir Randal at the hotel, and both he and Lady Starkey were delighted to make the acquaintance of the Comte de Clairvaux, whom they well knew by reputation.

All necessary arrangements had been entrusted to the clever courier, by whom charming apartments, commanding a view of the Mediterranean, were provided, and plenty of time was left the squire and his wife to take a walk with Mildred on the Promenade des Anglais before dinner.

## XIII.

## MR. WARBURTON AND LADY STARKEY AT NICE.

MR. WARBURTON and Lady Starkey were charmed with Nice. It surpassed all their expectations, and they were never tired of the promenade near the blue Mediterranean.

The society at the hotel exactly suited them, and they did not care to increase it by any new acquaintances. They met Sister Aline in Mildred's room. But the party that met together each day on the parade in the public gardens was now very strong, and needed no additions, though new-comers were always anxious to join it, but the comte and Sir Randal took its direction upon themselves, and prevented its increase.

It was now quite clear that the comte had begun to entertain a tender feeling for Lady Talmash, and notwithstanding her assurances to the contrary to Charles Kynaston, she seemed to give her new admirer every encouragement. He was always with her, and it is quite certain she could have dismissed him at a moment's notice, if she had been so inclined. But though Charles Kynaston gave her repeated hints, she never attended to them. She had now become identified with the comte by the *grand monde* at Nice, and didn't care for giving him up.

Sir Randal, though he proceeded in a much quieter manner, had likewise gained the reputation of a man of gallantry. Several ladies threw out lures to him, but without success. He was not to be captured easily.

Now that her aunt had arrived, Rose was obliged to spend much more time with her, and less with Marston Malpas. But this she did not regret, as she had become rather tired of Malpas,

Mr. Warburton devoted himself to his daughter, for whom all his former affection seemed to be revived.

Feeling he should soon be separated from her—perhaps, for ever—he spent as much time as possible in her society, and was pleased and surprised at the change that had taken place in her opinions. The daily discourse that took place between him and Sister Aline seemed to do him a great deal of good, and he tried to treasure what he heard in his memory, as he felt it would be a great comfort to reflect upon it hereafter.

“I hope you are happy here, my dear child?” he said to Mildred one day.

“Perfectly happy, dearest papa,” she replied, regarding him with eyes full of affection. “I am so thankful you have come to see me.”

“Yes, dear Mr. Warburton,” remarked Sister Aline, “you may rest satisfied that your warm parental regard is fully appreciated. At one time I was afraid you would not see your daughter again.”

“Heaven has listened to my prayer, and I am truly grateful,” he replied, earnestly.

“I hope you won’t leave me soon now you have come,” said Mildred. “Your presence is an inconceivable comfort to me.”

“I will stay with you as long as I can, depend upon it,” replied her father. “And I want no inducement to do so, for I think Nice a most delightful place.”

“But you do not enjoy it sufficiently,” said Mildred. “You ought to pass more of your time on the promenade or in the Jardin Public.”

“If you could go out, I would accompany you,” he replied. “As it is, I prefer being with you here.”

Just then Georgette announced the Comte de Clairvaux, and the next moment that distinguished personage entered and bowed to the company. He conducted his discourse in English, as he fancied the squire would like it best, and he was right.

He had not been long in the room when he began to sing the praises of Lady Talmash, and spoke of her in rapturous terms.

“Are you aware, Monsieur le Comte, that her ladyship is engaged?” observed Sister Aline.

"To whom?" he rejoined, astounded.

"To Mr. Charles Kynaston. "I believe I am correct?" she said, appealing to Mildred.

"No doubt about it," rejoined the other. "She told me so herself."

"Diable!" exclaimed the comte. "I wonder she didn't tell *me*."

"Possibly she may give you the preference after all, comte," said the squire, laughing. "It seems as if she meant it."

"I hope she may," rejoined the comte. "I don't doubt what I am told, but I should never have guessed it. I don't think her ladyship has spoken a dozen words to Mr. Kynaston since I have been here. Very likely she is tired of him."

"I'll tell you what to do," said the squire, who seemed in a jesting mood. "You shall play with him for her."

"Quite impossible, papa," said Mildred. "Are you not aware that Charles Kynaston has forsown cards and dice?"

"How long ago?" asked the comte.

"Since he won a large sum at Mentone," replied Mildred.

"Then he will soon break his vow," said the comte. "But I fancy I hear a well-known voice without."

As he spoke the door was opened by Georgette, and Lady Talmash entered, followed by Charles Kynaston and Stanley. Her ladyship seemed enchanted to find the comte, and accepted the chair he offered her, after shaking hands with Mildred and Sister Aline.

Stanley came forward, but Charles Kynaston soon found himself *de trop*.

In spite of the intelligence he had just received, the comte continued his attentions to her ladyship.

"I looked for you on the parade, but did not find you," he said.

"I cannot tell you how it happened," she replied. "I was certainly there, and should have been charmed to meet you."

"I saw the comte at a distance," remarked Charles Kynaston.

"Why didn't you tell me?" rejoined her ladyship rather sharply.

"I had no idea you wished to speak to him."

"I wished to do so particularly."

"Then I'm excessively sorry—pray forgive me."

But her ladyship refused to listen to him.

"I tell you what it is, Charley," whispered Stanley, "you've got a rival—a formidable rival."

"I won't stand it any longer," replied Kynaston, in the same tone. "I've had too much of it already. I'll speak to the comte at once."

"Don't," said Stanley, restraining him. "Take my advice and leave things alone."

"S'death! shall I stand still, and see him carry her off?"

"Poh! he doesn't mean to carry her off," replied Stanley. "But you'll certainly lose her if you interfere."

"What would you have me do, then?"

"Submit," rejoined Stanley.

"Well, I'll try, but it will be hard work," replied the other.

Fancying from the young man's manner that he had withdrawn his pretensions to her ladyship's hand, the comte felt quite easy.

But Charles Kynaston was not so indifferent as he seemed, and resolved to come to a speedy understanding with her ladyship.

It must be owned that it required a good deal of patience to bear calmly all the annoyances the young man had to put up with that morning, and though Stanley advised him to submit, he wondered he did so.

While paying his court to Lady Talmash, the comte found means to make himself generally agreeable.

A ball was given that night at the Cercle Massena, for which he had procured tickets, and these he distributed among the company.

Charles Kynaston seemed inclined to refuse, not wishing to be beholden to one whom he regarded as a rival, but a significant look from her ladyship made him alter his determination.

"I hope Lady Starkey and her niece will grace the ball with their presence," said the comte to Mr. Warburton. "Perhaps it is too much to expect the pleasure of your company?"

"I never dance," replied the squire, laughing, "and should only be in the way, so you must be good enough to excuse me. I would rather spend the evening here."

"As you please," said the comte; "but it will be a very

gay ball. Our friend, Sir Randal, has promised to attend it, with Mr. Marston Malpas."

"Ah! Sir Randal will continue gay to the last," said the squire; "my dancing days are over."

Soon after this the party separated, and several of them proceeded to the Promenade des Anglais, but the squire did not quit his daughter's room.

His affection for her had increased since his arrival at Nice, and he could not bear to be absent from her. Though he received satisfactory assurances from the physicians, he was full of uneasiness lest she should have another dangerous attack, and every possible care was taken to ward it off.

That night, when all the rest of the party had gone to the ball, Mr. Warburton was seated with his daughter. They were alone, for Sister Aline had retired to her own room.

In reply to her father's inquiries as to her continued improvement, Mildred said:

"My improvement is very slow, dearest papa, and you must promise to take me home at once if I have a recurrence of those dangerous symptoms. Much as I like Nice, I don't wish to die here."

"Your wishes shall be attended to," he replied; "but I trust you may go back cured."

"Do not delude yourself, dearest papa; I shall never be perfectly cured."

And she then told him how she had swallowed poison, from the effects of which she had never recovered.

Mr. Warburton was greatly distressed by the narration.

"Heaven forgive you, my dear child, and spare you!" he exclaimed. "I know your repentance has been deep and sincere."

"And my breast is lighter than it was, but it is still heavily burdened. I cannot bear to look back on the past. What a happy life I have thrown away!"

"You may still have a happy life, dear child," he said.

"Not unless I can purchase oblivion," she rejoined, almost in accents of despair. "In spite of all my efforts to repress them, the recollection of certain follies I have committed will rise before me and torment me. No, I do not desire to live long. I shall be best out of the way. But I pray for a tranquil end."

"And that you will have, rest assured, dear child," he said.

"You comfort me greatly," she replied. "My anticipations have been gloomy and despairing. But for good Sister Aline, who has likewise greatly comforted me, I should not be living now."

"Yes, you owe much to her," said Mr. Warburton.

"I owe everything," replied Mildred. "That which is far dearer to me than life—my chance of salvation."

"I rejoice to find you in such a frame of mind," said her father. "But I must express a hope that you may long be spared."

"Wherefore?" she rejoined. "I repeat I am only in the way, and interfere with the happiness of others. Hear me, dearest papa. When I am gone, it is my wish that Stanley should marry Rose Hylton. She will make him an excellent wife, and the match will be agreeable to all."

"I cannot bear to contemplate such an event," said her father.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because you must needs have left us before it can take place."

"What of that? You must lose me, sooner or later."

"No more, or you will break my heart!" he cried, hurrying out of the room.

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#### XIV.

##### MILDRED DESIRES TO LEAVE NICE.

A good deal of amusement was going on at Nice at this time, and owing to the attention of the Comte de Clairvaux, Lady Talmash and the ladies of her party partook of it all.

Scarcely an evening passed on which something attractive did not take place—ball, concert, or opera—and all went to these entertainments except the squire. Lady Starkey was

as gay as the rest, but declared she only acted as her niece's chaperon. The mornings were passed on the various promenades, and in the public gardens, or at pic-nic parties, and at such times the squire could be seen amid the fashionable throng, but never in the evening.

But for Lady Starkey, it is probable Sir Randal de Blundeville would not have been found so frequently as he was at these reunions; but he liked her society, and her ladyship was pleased to have him with her.

Thus the time passed very pleasantly, and the same sort of thing might have gone on for a month or two longer, had it not been interrupted by Mildred's illness.

Again the ruthless mistral did the mischief, and inflicted a cold upon her, that alarmed everybody.

When she recovered, which she did by the constant attention and skilful treatment of Dr. Travis, she had a private talk with her father, and said to him:

"Now, dearest papa, I must remind you of your promise to take me back; in case Nice should fail to restore me. I am anxious to go, as I have a presentiment that the next attack will be fatal. I have said nothing on the subject to any one, except Sister Aline, who agrees with me as to the danger, but advises me to stay here to the last. But I won't do that, if I can help it."

"You shall not be kept here against your wish, depend upon it, my dear child," said her father; "and I must own you do look very ill."

"I am convinced I have not long to live, papa, or I should not speak to you thus," she rejoined. "I have not mentioned my wish to Stanley, for several reasons—and I feel sure you will grant my last request."

"You are right, my dear child, I will," replied the squire. "Let Stanley remain here a month longer, if he likes."

"A month will be too long, papa," she rejoined. "All will be over by that time."

"Don't make yourself uneasy," he rejoined. "You shall start by the next steamer to Marseilles, and I will go with you, and take care of you."

"Oh, thank you, dearest papa," she cried. "Sister Aline and Georgette will look after me. The others can follow at their leisure."

"Yes, that will be the best plan," he rejoined. "But I wish to speak to Lady Starkey, and hear what she has to say."

"I know what she will say, papa. She won't like to be hurried. Nor will Lady Talmash—or Rose. Their gaiety must not be interrupted. Let me disappear."

"It shall be so," said her father. "With regard to the others it matters not. But have you no wish that Stanley should accompany you?"

"I am certain he would rather remain, and why tear him hence? I have shown myself selfish all my life, but now I will act otherwise."

Mr. Warburton regarded her with admiration.

"When do you think you will be ready to start on the homeward journey?" he asked.

"To-morrow," she replied. "Is that too soon?"

"Not for me," he rejoined. "But I don't think the steamer takes its departure for Marseilles till the day after. As the weather is so fine, I feel sure you will enjoy the little voyage, and I sincerely hope it may do you good."

"The plan you propose is charming, papa," she replied, "and is infinitely preferable to the carriage of a vetturino. This very morning I was gazing on the blue Mediterranean, and thinking how much I should like a few hours on its waters—and now I shall have my wish."

"I will go at once and explain our plans to Lady Starkey," said her father. "I am sure she will approve of them, and I feel almost certain she will remain here a week or two longer. Make your own preparations for departure, and I will take care of all the rest."

"My preparations will be easily made, dear papa," she said, "and I again thank you most sincerely for so readily granting my request."

"Could you suppose I would refuse you anything?" he replied, regarding her with indescribable affection.

Just as he was about to take his departure, Sister Aline came in, attended by Georgette.

"Mildred has some news for you," he said. "I hope you will think it good news."

"I won't keep you in suspense," said Mildred, "and it concerns Georgette as well as you. Papa has kindly promised to take me back to Beaucliffe. We shall start by the next steamer to Marseilles."

"Delightful!" exclaimed the irrepressible Georgette.

"Knowing what you yourself desire, I rejoice at the information," said Sister Aline.

"Pray, let nothing be said about my approaching departure," said Mildred. "I don't wish it talked about, and no one will miss me."

"There you are greatly mistaken, my dear child," remarked the squire. "Many persons of whom you know nothing, are greatly interested in you, and will be sorry when you are gone. You may console yourself with that reflection."

"Yes, I can assure you, madam," said Georgette, "there are many persons who constantly inquire after you."

"I did not suppose it possible," said Mildred; "but I am greatly obliged to them. Nice has been very kind to me, and I am not insensible to the sympathy shown me. If I fly from the place at this moment, it is not that I have any complaint to make, but that I have tender recollections elsewhere, that draw me forcibly towards another spot. I yield to them, because they overpower me."

"Content you, my dear child, you will soon be back at Beaucliffe," said her father.

"Never again to leave it," she replied.

Tears sprang to the squire's eyes, and unable to control his emotion, he hastily quitted the room.

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## XV.

### MILDRED QUILTS NICE.

THE squire lost no time in acquainting Lady Starkey with Mildred's anxious desire to return, as well as the plan he had proposed to her, of which her ladyship entirely approved.

"As you yourself, as well as Sister Aline, will accompany the invalid, I do not think it will be necessary for Stanley to make one of the party, and in my opinion he had better stay and take charge of us."

"I had already arranged it so in my own mind, and am glad you entertain a similar opinion," rejoined the squire. "Stanley will be very useful to you, and those with you while we do not require him."

"Either he or you must remain with us, that's certain," said her ladyship.

"Then the matter is settled, for I have promised Mildred to attend her," replied the squire.

When the plan was propose to Stanley, he required very little persuasion to accede to it.

"If her father accompanies her, there can be no occasion for me, especially as she will have Sister Aline and Georgette with her. We can follow in a week or two. But the decision seems very sudden."

"Extremely sudden," replied Lady Starkey. "I cannot understand it; and except in a case of absolute necessity, I should be sorry to break up so pleasant a party."

"It may seem unkind in me not to accompany my wife," said Stanley; "and if I could be of any real service, I should not hesitate for a moment. But I am sure Mr. Warburton would not be pleased if I insisted on taking his place. Besides, to speak the truth, I don't think Mildred wants to have me with her."

"Possibly," replied her ladyship.

The announcement of Mr. Warburton's intended departure with his daughter and her friend caused some sensation, but much satisfaction was manifested when it was explained that all the other ladies, who contributed so much to the gaiety of the place, would remain. The Comte de Clairvaux vowed that if Lady Talmash took flight he would not be left behind; and Sir Randal made a similar declaration in regard to Lady Starkey. Now, everybody was satisfied.

But the greatest interest attached to Mildred, and as soon as it became known that she was about to leave Nice, a general expression of regret was heard, and when her slight figure was last visible on the parade, a hundred eyes followed it, and many persons stood still to gaze at her. She was walking with Stanley, who evidently suffered much himself.

The steamer for Marseilles took its departure from the port at Nice at noon on the third day after the decision had been taken by Mr. Warburton and his daughter to proceed by that course.

Nothing could be more favourable than the weather. The sea was as smooth as glass, and tempted all those who gazed upon its blue expanse to a voyage.

Earlier in the morning, Mildred bade an affectionate farewell to all those friends who had come to take leave of her, very few of whom ever expected to behold her again. But when they expressed an earnest desire to accompany her to the steamer, and remain on board with her till the vessel started, she declined.

"I should not have strength for the parting, under such circumstances," she said. "I must bid you farewell here."

All the luggage had been taken on board, and Mr. Warburton followed with Sister Aline and Georgette. Only Mildred and Stanley were left. When it came to the last, Stanley deeply regretted that he had not insisted on accompanying his wife, but it was too late now to alter his determination.

Though Mildred had already taken leave of all her assembled friends—of Ladies Starkey and Talmash, of Rose, of Sir Randal, of the Comte de Clairvaux, of Charles Kynaston, and Marston Malpas—she had another painful leave-taking to endure before her departure, and it was almost too much for her.

Almost in a fainting state she was placed in a close carriage by Stanley, and driven down to the port, where the splendid steamer was waiting to receive her passengers. Mildred had just strength enough left to get on board, but fainted before she could reach the cabin, and had to be placed on a seat, where she could be seen by the crowd who had come to witness her departure.

When she opened her eyes, they rested on the basin of Nice, surrounded by lofty habitations, intermingled with towers, and backed by gentle hills covered with olives and crowned by villas. Above all, on the left towered the grand pyramid of Mont Cau, the whole forming a superb picture, on which Mildred's eyes were fixed as long as it remained in sight.

But many other magnificent spectacles were presented to her as the vessel shaped its course over the blue and glassy Mediterranean.

## XVI.

## DOCTOR PERCIVAL.

WHOSO has tracked the lovely coast bordering the Maritime Alps, need not be told of its incomparable beauty. Nothing more picturesque—nothing more enchanting can be imagined.

Such was Mildred's voyage from Nice to Marseilles. The weather was perfect. A gentle breeze, just sufficient to fill the latteen sails of some of the lesser craft that entered the harbour, but scarcely disturbed the placid surface of the Mediterranean, served to mitigate the heat.

The steamer, which seemed only to consult the wishes of those on board, kept as close as she could with safety to the lovely coast, and touched at several interesting places—Antibes, Frejus, Saint Tropez, Hyères—where some of the passengers landed.

Screened from the rays of the sun by a thick awning, those on deck—and almost everyone was on deck—enjoyed a multitude of magnificent views.

The vessel stopped for the night at Toulon, and started betimes next morning with several fresh passengers, for Marseilles, being favoured with the same exquisite weather.

Mildred, who fancied she felt better, and was in very good spirits, was greatly pleased by the appearance of the bustling and crowded seaport, filled with vessels of all nations, but was not sorry to be transferred to an excellent hotel in the Rue Canebière, where delightful apartments were given them.

The squire immediately telegraphed their safe arrival to Stanley, telling him they meant to rest for a couple of days at Marseilles, before starting for Paris.

A prompt response was received from Stanley, stating that he would join them at Marseilles as soon as the railway could bring him there; and next morning they were not surprised, though greatly pleased, to see him at breakfast.

"This is exceedingly kind of you, Stanley," said the squire; "but I really did not mean to suggest it."

"Ever since Mildred's departure I have been wretched," cried Stanley; "and as an opportunity offered of spending a few hours with her, I determined to embrace it, and started at once for Marseilles."

"I am very glad you came, dear Stanley," said Mildred. "I had begun to fancy I should never see you again, and you may therefore imagine what a satisfaction it is to have you here."

Her looks spoke more than her words, and touched him so much that he exclaimed:

"Only say the word, and I will go on with you to Beauliffe."

"Oh! no, no! I won't be so exacting," she rejoined. "You have already done enough to prove your love for me. I don't require more. On your return to Nice, you will be able to tell my dear friends that I am looking tolerably well—certainly better than when I left them. We had really a most splendid voyage—I never shall forget it—and I am sure it has done me infinite good."

"You look better," said Stanley. "Now tell me, dearest Mildred. You forbid me to go to Beauliffe with you, but shall I accompany you to Paris? Would you like me with you?"

"Very much indeed," she replied.

"Then I'll go," he cried.

"But not further than Paris," said the squire. "You must return to Nice; they won't know what to do without you."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that," replied Stanley. "But never fear—I'll go back from Paris."

After breakfast they engaged an open carriage, and did as much sight-seeing as Mildred could stand with safety; visiting the Palais des Arts de Long Champ, the new cathedral near the quay of the Joilette, and several other public edifices. Though much pleased with Marseilles, Mildred declared she preferred Nice.

Sleeping accommodation being secured for Mildred and Sister Aline as well as for Georgette, in the night mail to Paris, the journey contemplated by the party was accomplished very satisfactorily.

Mildred slept as well as usual while flying thus swiftly over the country, and could scarcely believe she was within a few hours of Paris when she shook off her slumbers.

Sister Aline, who could not sleep, passed the greater part of the night in prayer. Georgette never opened her eyes till she got to Fontainebleau.

Having telegraphed for rooms at the Hotel du Louvre, they drove thither at once on their arrival at Paris.

After her long and rapid journey, Mildred found the gayest city in the world much too exciting for her.

Convinced of this by a single drive to the Bois de Boulogne and the Champs Elysées, from which she returned greatly fatigued, she resolved to remain quiet till her departure, fearing that otherwise she should not be able to accomplish the remainder of the journey.

Both Stanley and her father were of the same opinion, and counselled a couple of days' complete quietude before proceeding to London.

During a private conversation which they had together at this time, in the course of which Mildred expressed her firm conviction that she should not live long, she said to her husband, with a look he never afterwards forgot :

"When I am gone—as I soon shall be—I strongly advise you to marry Rose."

He was about to interrupt her, but she went on :

"She will make you an excellent wife. On that you may depend. Will you do as I tell you?"

"I can't promise," he replied. "Nor can I even entertain the suggestion, though I am certain you are influenced by the best and kindest feelings in making it."

"I am anxious you should not lose her—that is why I urge the matter."

"I fully recognise the kindness of your motive, and thank you," he replied. "And now no more."

Next morning, at an early hour, Mr. Warburton and those with him left Paris by an early express train.

Stanley accompanied them to the station, and there bade adieu to Mildred, almost fearing he should never behold her again.

The weather being very favourable, they had a quick passage from Calais to Dover, and proceeded immediately to

London, where they put up at the squire's favourite hotel, the Grosvenor.

Having made up his mind to consult Dr. Percival, an eminent physician with whom he was acquainted, about his daughter, Mr. Warburton went in good time next morning to Hanover-square to call upon him.

Between fifty and sixty, tall, bald, with a fresh complexion, Dr. Percival had a very prepossessing expression of countenance, which was generally brightened by a smile.

"Your daughter was one of the most charming creatures I ever beheld, Mr. Warburton," he said. "I am sorry to hear she is unwell."

"She is dangerously ill, doctor," replied the squire. And he proceeded to explain the case.

Doctor Percival listened attentively to what was told him, and the smile that had hitherto lighted up his pleasant countenance disappeared, and was succeeded by a very grave expression.

But he gave no opinion at the time, and promised to call at the Grosvenor in the course of the afternoon, in order to see the young lady, and judge for himself.

Accordingly, he came, and was taken by her father to Mildred, who was in an adjoining room with Sister Aline.

Nothing material was said while Mr. Warburton was present; but as soon as he was gone Dr. Percival drew his chair closer to the invalid, and commenced his examination.

Evidently he thought her in a most critical state, though he endeavoured not to alarm her, but there were some questions put that showed he suspected what had been the origin of her illness.

Mildred, therefore, thought it right to tell him all, and confessed that, in a moment of despair, she had endeavoured to destroy herself by poison.

"But she has deeply, very deeply, repented of the rash act," interposed Sister Aline.

"No doubt," said Dr. Percival; "and I can quite understand how much she must have suffered ere she made the attempt. Is your father aware of this?" he added, addressing Mildred.

"He is," she replied.

"This explains much, though it does not lessen the gravity of the case," said the doctor. "You must stay with me a

few days, and I shall know better how to treat you. When the prescription I am about to write is made up, it shall be sent you. To-morrow, at the same hour, I will pay you another visit. Pray, keep up your spirits; and do you, good sister, try to convince her that her case is not desperate."

"I trust I may do so conscientiously," replied Sister Aline.

"I shall hope to see you to-morrow, doctor," said Mildred.

At the same time, Sister Aline rang the bell, and the door was immediately opened by Georgette, who inquired of the doctor most anxiously, as she let him out, how he found madame.

"As well as I supposed," he rejoined.

He then went to the squire, who was in an adjoining room, and said to him at once:

"I deem it indispensable, Mr. Warburton, that your daughter should remain a few days in town."

"Well, since you say so, my dear doctor, she must," replied the squire. "But I did not calculate on the delay."

"You must give me a chance of curing her," said the doctor. "I have only just learnt what has caused this dangerous illness, and we must get rid of it."

"I hoped it was got rid of," replied the squire.

"Not entirely."

"What is your real opinion of the case, doctor? Pray, don't disguise it from me. Is there any likelihood of her recovery?"

"Don't question me," replied Dr. Percival. "Hope must be given her, or she will infallibly sink. She tells me she has no wish to live, and I entirely believe her. You must raise her spirits, if you can."

"I don't know how," replied the squire, heaving a deep sigh. "Sister Aline, whom you have seen, and who is her constant companion, does not take a very cheerful view of things."

"Apparently not," replied the doctor. "To-morrow, I will see your daughter again, and trust to find some little improvement in her."

And he took his departure.

The squire could not disobey Dr. Percival's injunctions, and since they were positive as to the necessity of remaining in town for a few days, he had no alternative but compliance.

He therefore telegraphed at once to Stanley and Lady Starkey that he was staying at the Grosvenor, where Mildred was under the care of Dr. Percival, and would probably remain there for a few days. But he begged them not to disquiet themselves, as they should receive the earliest intelligence if any unfavourable change took place.

Immediate replies from both were sent, expressing great concern that Mildred should be detained, and Stanley declared that he held himself in readiness to start at once for London, should his presence be needed.

On her part, Lady Starkey recommended Mr. Warburton to take possession of the house in Berkeley-square. But being well off at the Grosvenor, he did not think he should change his quarters.

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## XVII.

### LETTERS FROM NICE.

DOCTOR PERCIVAL continued in daily attendance on Mildred, evidently taking the greatest interest in her, and was exceedingly disappointed that a more decided improvement was not manifest.

She certainly looked somewhat better, but the doctor could not pronounce her out of danger.

"I can't think what it is that baffles me," he said to the squire, in one of their private colloquies, "but I must and will find it out."

Telegraphic messages had been daily exchanged between the little party at the Grosvenor and the others at Nice, but one day, a letter arrived for Mildred. -It was from Stanley, and the sight of his well-known handwriting quite cheered her.

"I am glad to find you improving, dearest Mildred," he wrote. "You are in excellent hands. If any one can cure you it is Doctor Percival. Lady Talmash has the highest opinion of him. Apropos of her ladyship, I must tell you

that we have been threatened with a duel between two of her admirers—Charles Kynaston and the Comte de Clairvaux. The incident occurred on the Promenade des Anglais. I was walking in front with Rose. Behind us were the comte and her ladyship; and behind them Sir Randolph and Lady Starkey. Well, up comes Charles, looking very angry, and says to Lady Talmash, ‘When you have quite done with the comte, I shall be glad if you can spare a few minutes for me.’ The answer was given by De Clairvaux himself, who said, with the utmost politeness, ‘I am afraid you will have to wait some time, sir. Her ladyship is engaged to me for the whole day.’ ‘Impossible,’ cried Charles. ‘No, it is true,’ said Lady Talmash, ‘and I intend to remain with him.’ ‘Is this meant as an affront, M. le Comte?’ asked Charles. ‘Exactly as you like to take it, sir,’ replied the comte with provoking calmness. ‘Then I shall take it as an *affront sanglant*,’ replied Charles, walking away. ‘There will be a duel, unless it is prevented,’ observed Rose to me. ‘I will try to prevent it,’ I replied. Then addressing De Clairvaux, I expressed a hope that the quarrel might be arranged. ‘The matter does not rest with me, but with Mr. Charles Kynaston,’ he replied. ‘I shall offer him no apology for what I have said, and if he challenges me I shall meet him.’ ‘And I will act as your *te-moin*,’ I said. ‘I don’t think a duel ought to take place,’ remarked Lady Talmash. ‘It is by my express desire that the comte remained with me. Charles Kynaston has broken his solemn promise not to play, and has visited the gaming tables at Monaco. Fortune, it is true, has favoured him, and he has won. But no matter, I have done with him for ever!’ I had heard nothing of this, nor had any one else, not even the Comte de Clairvaux himself, who now declared that he would not meet Mr. Kynaston, as he had not acted like a gentleman.

“The affair proceeded no further, but it is very unpleasant and has ended in Charles Kynaston’s positive dismissal by Lady Talmash.”

Mildred was very much surprised, and, indeed, pained by the contents of the letter, but when she showed it to her father he shook his head, and said: “An inveterate gambler will never be cured, and Charles Kynaston is an inveterate gambler.”

Next day brought more letters from Nice, and amongst

them one from Lady Talmash herself which Mildred immediately opened.

After expressing her great satisfaction that Mildred was under Dr. Percival's care, her ladyship entered upon her own business. "I have no doubt Stanley has told you I have dismissed Charles Kynaston, and the reason why. I believe Charles meant to keep the disgraceful affair secret, for he said nothing to me of his visit to Monaco, nor should I have heard of it had I not received a letter giving me an account of the dishonourable proceeding. I call it dishonourable, because he had vowed never to play again. When he next presented himself to me, I received him very coldly, and charged him with what he had done. He could not deny it, but made several idle excuses. I told him his conduct was utterly unworthy a gentleman, that our engagement was entirely at an end, and that I never would receive him again. He expressed the utmost contrition for what he had done, but would not take a dismissal. However, I put an end to the interview.

"Then followed the quarrel with the Comte de Clairvaux, of which no doubt you have heard from Stanley. What expectations the delinquent may have formed I know not, but I do not mean to forgive him. I could have no reliance upon him in future. He answers completely to Mr. Warburton's notion of a confirmed gambler. I can come to no decision respecting the Comte de Clairvaux. I am sure he likes me, and persuades himself that I would accept him. But I cannot make up my mind to do so. He has many recommendations. He belongs to an old, aristocratic family—with a title in it—has most polished manners, as you are aware, and could introduce Madame la Comtesse to the *crème de la crème* of Parisian society, but shall I venture to whisper it?—he is *un peu trop vieux*. No! Much as I like him, I don't think I *could* marry him. This is the exact state of affairs at present. What will happen I cannot foretell."

"But I can," said Sister Aline, to whom the letter was read, and who knew the comte intimately in former days. "She *will* marry him, and she will choose well, for he is as kind-hearted as he is agreeable."

The next letter opened was from Rose, who said that constant inquiries were made after the beautiful invalid, who was much missed by her numerous friends. Rose could not tell how long Lady Starkey meant to remain, but she had not yet fixed the date of their departure. Nice was a most charming

place certainly, but she was getting rather tired of it, and should prefer being at Beaucliffe. Was Mildred aware that Marston Malpas had proposed to her? She fancied not. He was very amiable, and sufficiently rich—but she could not make up her mind to accept him.

“Now, dearest Mildred, I wish to ask you a question, and beg you to answer me sincerely, and rest assured I will act as you wish. Circumstances have thrown me and Stanley very much together of late. Do you disapprove of this? If you do, our intimacy shall cease. But Stanley declares you like me, and won’t object, and my aunt is of the same opinion. I am so glad your papa has called in that wonderful Dr. Percival. When I come back, I hope to find he has quite cured you. Lady Talmash, who has the greatest faith in the doctor, confidently predicts that such will be the case.”

Mildred smiled as she laid down the letter, and said to Sister Aline, “I think they have formed a correct opinion of Dr. Percival, undoubtedly he is a very clever man.”

There was one letter left. It was for the squire, and was evidently from his wife. On his return from a walk he opened it.

“Since I last wrote to you,” said her ladyship, “I have had a long talk with Lady Talmash about Dr. Percival, and she has convinced me that he is a man of remarkable ability, and I am not now without hopes of a complete cure in Mildred’s case. It will certainly be a most astonishing thing if it occurs, for all here have been in despair. The match between Lady Talmash and Charles Kynaston is broken off, and I am not sorry for it, for he was not at all worthy of her in my opinion; and I think he will be succeeded by the Comte de Clairvaux, to whom I should be glad to see her united, and so, I think, would you. Sir Randal de Blundeville is still here, and the more I see of him the better I like him. He is the model of a gentleman of the old school. If you approve, I will ask him to spend a week with us at Beaucliffe on his return. Rose has decidedly refused Marston Malpas, and I am not sorry for it, as I think him a very stupid fellow.”

“And now you will naturally ask how long we mean to stay here? A fortnight, I should say, but this will entirely depend on your own movements. Again I recommend you to take possession of the house in Berkeley-square. Mildred and her friend, Sister Aline, would be exceedingly comfortable

there, Unless you are going at once to Beaucliffe, this will be much your best plan."

"What's your opinion?" said the squire to Mildred, after reading this portion of Lady Starkey's missive to her.

"I think we may as well remain here," she replied.

"So do I," he said.

Two days afterwards the squire received another letter from Stanley, which was luckily delivered to him in his own room.

"I have a distressing story to relate to you," said Stanley. "Mention it cautiously to Mildred, as it might produce a painful effect upon her. You know that Charles Kynaston was dismissed by Lady Talmash in consequence of having broken his word in regard to play. He took the matter greatly to heart, and became very low-spirited. I called upon him, and found him very much altered. I tried to cheer him, but when he asked whether the quarrel could be arranged, I told him frankly, I thought not. I was very sorry afterwards for what I said, since it seems to have decided him in his fatal purpose. That night the poor fellow blew out his brains. I deeply regret his fate, for though an incurable gambler, he was kind and generous, and had many good qualities."

"Poor fellow! I am very sorry for him!" exclaimed the squire, as he finished the letter.

But though Stanley wished to keep this distressing circumstance from Mildred, Lady Talmash was not so considerate. Next day brought a letter from her, in which the catastrophe and its causes were fully detailed.

"I have been dreadfully shocked by a terrible event that has just occurred," said her ladyship. "Yesterday I tried to write to you—but could not—and to day I am not much better. Poor Charles Kynaston has put a pistol to his head, and destroyed himself. Is it not dreadful? I shall ever reproach myself with being the cause of his death—though it was the furthest thing from my thoughts to drive him to despair—nor did I think he would commit such a rash act. Alas! alas! I shall ever grieve for him. There is the last letter he wrote me. Keep it, or destroy it. I shall never read it—never look at it again."

Greatly touched by what she had read, Mildred took up

poor Charles Kynaston's letter which had been enclosed in the other, and read as follows, with tearful eyes :

" Since I have lost your love, and forfeited your respect, life has become a burden to me, and the sooner I am rid of it the better. I loved you deeply, and notwithstanding my grave faults, I believe we might have been happy together. At all events I should have been a most devoted husband. For some time I indulged the hope that you would forgive me, and take me again into favour ; but when I found you inexorable, and your love for me quite gone, life became a blank. I had nothing but despair at my heart, and my anguish was absolutely intolerable. Perhaps, when I am gone—as I soon shall be—you will bestow a kindly thought upon my memory."

Not without deep emotion did Mildred read this letter, and her father had to brush the tears from his eyes more than once before he got through it.

" Poor Charles Kynaston !" he exclaimed. " I thought his would be a happier fate."

" I am very sorry for Lady Talmash," said Mildred. " I am afraid she will suffer severely from the shock."

Some days after this date, the squire was able to despatch a very satisfactory letter to his wife, the contents of which surprised as much as they pleased her.

" I have not written to you for the last week, because I wished to feel quite sure, before reporting it, that the wonderful cure effected by Dr. Percival would prove lasting.

" A few days since, a change for the better became apparent in Mildred, and ever since then there has been a continuous improvement. The poor invalid, who seems to have been snatched from the very jaws of death, is now getting better and stronger. Dr. Percival is quite proud of the cure he has effected, and well he may be, for it seems almost miraculous. How much I owe him ! and what a lucky chance led me to him ! Even when I first consulted him, I was slow to recognise his extraordinary skill. But now there are no bounds to my admiration and gratitude. The poor invalid of a week ago, who could scarcely stir out of the house, is now able to drive in the Park, and even walk in Kensington Gardens. I am almost beside myself with wonder and delight. Though Dr. Percival says he considers Mildred perfectly cured, at my earnest request he still visits her daily,

and his manner is so cheerful and kindly that he does us all good.

"Ere long, I believe, Mildred will have regained all her former beauty. Dr. Percival thinks she will be handsomer than ever.

"Some people at Nice admired her late delicate appearance and spiritual expression. I very much prefer her present healthy looks.

"Pray give these cheering tidings to all our friends, by whom I am sure they will be received with the greatest satisfaction. Mildred herself will write to Stanley.

"As you will see from the address of this letter, we have followed your advice, and taken possession of the house in Berkeley-square, and are enchanted with it. Adieu!"

So astonished was Lady Starkey by this unlooked for intelligence that she could scarcely believe what she read, but she knew the squire too well to suppose for a moment that he would exaggerate.

Stanley and Rose, together with Lady Talmash, who had not yet recovered from the dreadful shock occasioned by Charles Kynaston's death, were on the promenade at the time, but on their return she sent for them.

"I have wonderful news for you," she said; "news that will surprise and delight you."

She then read them Mr. Warburton's letter, and when she finished, exclamations of astonishment were uttered by all.

"I never heard of such a remarkable case," cried Stanley.

"Marvellous!" exclaimed Rose. "Why, she was quite given up."

"Not by me," said Lady Talmash. "I felt confident Dr. Percival would cure her."

A good deal more was said, and nothing but expressions of the greatest satisfaction were heard, but some looks were exchanged between Stanley and Rose, which did not seem to indicate that they were as highly delighted as they professed.

But there could be no question as to the sincere pleasure with which the intelligence was received by Sir Randal, the Comte de Clairvaux, and many other friends.

The question of the immediate return of the entire party was likewise raised, but nothing was decided on.

Next day, the good news was confirmed by Mildred herself, from whom Stanley received a very satisfactory letter acquainting him with her perfect recovery.

"When I last wrote to you, dearest Stanley," she said, "hope was well-nigh extinguished in my breast, and I believed myself doomed. Since then, I have almost miraculously recovered. The poison, lurking in my veins, that was slowly destroying me, has been expelled, and I have now quite regained my health. I did not dare write this to you before, fearing I might be too sanguine. But my recovery is real and assured, and I may congratulate myself—as I do most sincerely—on having had such a skilful physician. When you see me again, you will think I must have swallowed an elixir, so wonderfully have I improved.

"No one could be more fortunate. Had I remained at Nice for another month, I should infallibly have sunk. Had I proceeded direct to Beaucliffe, as I originally intended, without stopping in London, the like fate must have befallen me. But I was saved by the care of the best and most thoughtful of fathers. Having the greatest faith in Dr. Percival, he sought him out immediately on his arrival in town. The doctor came—saw me, and cured me.

"Now have I not reason to be grateful for my wonderful preservation? But besides gratitude to my dear father and the skilful physician, I owe much to one who has watched by me, and sustained me by her prayers, and now rejoices at my recovery."

Stanley had just read this letter a second time, when Rose came into the room, and he gave it to her, watching her anxiously as her eye ran over its contents.

"What think you of that?" he asked.

"I think it most extraordinary," she replied, with an expression of countenance difficult to define. "I am very glad to receive such good news, but it entirely puts an end to the hopes I had recently ventured to indulge."

Stanley made no reply, but was evidently of the same opinion.

"All is now at an end between us," she continued, sadly.

"For the present, it seems—but not, I trust, for ever," he rejoined.

"Yes, for ever," she returned. "I am afraid we must not meet again."

"Surely, we may meet as friends?"

"No, we cannot be too careful," said Rose. "I must not expose myself to censorious observation. The tidings of Mildred's wonderful recovery will soon be generally known in Nice, and will create a great sensation amongst the visitors. Thenceforward every eye will be upon us, and all sorts of conjectures will be made."

"I know it," cried Stanley. "I know how fond of scandal people here are. But I cannot give up your society,"

"You must. We cannot be constantly together as we have been of late without exposing ourselves—as I have just said—to unpleasant remarks. I must consult my aunt and Lady Talmash. But I know beforehand what both will advise under these altered circumstances. They will tell me we have no alternative but to part for ever."

"That would be hard indeed," cried Stanley. "You will drive me to despair."

"It is very painful to me, even to make the suggestion," she said, "but I cannot act otherwise, and on calm reflection you will feel I am right."

"But this must not be our last interview," he cried.

"I intended it should be. But if my aunt deems it proper I will meet you once more."

And she quitted the room, leaving him well-nigh heart-broken.

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## XVIII.

### STANLEY RETURNS FROM NICE.

IN the boudoir at Lady Starkey's charming house in Berkeley-square, and seated on a fauteuil, we shall find Mildred, looking very different from that young lady when prostrated by illness.

With renovated health all her beauty has returned, and though the bloom on her fair cheek may be somewhat more delicate than formerly, it could scarcely be improved. Indeed it may be doubted whether she ever looked lovelier than now. Her worthy father thought not.

A gentle expression, not entirely free from sadness, pervaded her countenance, and imparted a singular sweetness to her smile.

The coquetry that at one time characterised her, and seemed part of herself, had entirely vanished, and was succeeded by a very quiet, pleasing manner.

On the present occasion, her charms were enhanced, if possible, by a very becoming, though simple morning toilette, arranged by Georgette, who was still in the room, gazing with admiration at her lovely mistress.

On the opposite side of a little table, placed between them, sat Sister Aline.

For some minutes the latter had been contemplating her friend with mute satisfaction, and now said, "I am sure you are quite well enough to do without me, and I can therefore return to the Retreat."

"Oh! no, no. I cannot part with you yet," replied Mildred. "You must stay with me a little longer—you must accompany me to Beaucliffe."

"Oh! pray don't leave us!" implored Georgette.

"I dare not give a positive promise to stay," said Sister Aline, touched by their entreaties. "I may be recalled, and in that case, I must obey the mandate of the Lady Superior."

"I would not have you disobey it, dearest sister," rejoined Mildred. "But I have a special reason for begging you to accompany me to Beaucliffe. When the party return from Nice, as they will very shortly, we shall all meet there, and I shall want your counsel. Till lately, I thought my life was ended, and spoke and acted—so far as I acted at all—under that impression. Having recovered, I take a somewhat different view of things. Under these circumstances, no one, except my dear and excellent father, can give me such good advice as you."

"I will give you the best advice I can, depend upon it," replied Sister Aline. "I quite understand your position, and can judge what ought to be done. Unlooked-for difficulties may possibly arise, which I may help you to overcome. I will, therefore, accompany you to Beaucliffe—unless prevented."

At this juncture, Georgette, hearing well-known voices, flew to the door and opened it, admitting Mr. Warburton and Doctor Percival, the latter of whom immediately stepped for-

ward, and shook hands with his patient, while the squire addressed himself to Sister Aline.

"Still, the same good signs!" cried the doctor, holding Mildred's hand in his own, and triumphantly regarding her. "You are now on firm ground, and can stand alone."

"I believe so, doctor," she replied. "But you mustn't desert me."

"I don't mean to desert you," he replied. "But I must surrender you to your husband, who, I suppose, will soon come from Nice to claim you. Well, I shall have the proud satisfaction of delivering you to him perfectly cured."

"He will feel that he owes you a large debt of gratitude, doctor, as I do," said Mr. Warburton.

"You overrate my services, my good sir," replied the doctor, evidently much pleased. "But I own I have been remarkably fortunate. I wonder Mr. Brereton has not come back before this. With such a wife I don't think I should have been so long on the road."

"But you forget, doctor," said Mr. Warburton, "that she didn't look as well as she does now when he saw her last."

"True," replied Dr. Percival. "Still I can't understand the delay."

"Here he is," exclaimed Georgette. "That's his voice, I'm certain."

Again she threw open the door. In another moment Stanley rushed in, and instantly perceiving his wife, who had risen on his appearance, clasped her to his breast.

"A perfectly miraculous cure has, indeed, been wrought in you," he exclaimed, regarding her with astonishment.

"It has been wrought by the skilful physician, Dr. Percival, who now stands beside you," remarked Mr. Warburton.

"Yes, Mr. Brereton, and I assure you I am proud of my work," said Dr. Percival. "I never performed a cure with more satisfaction to myself."

Stanley took the hand offered him by the doctor, and shook it most heartily.

"I cannot thank you sufficiently, sir," he said. "Nor can I find adequate terms to express my satisfaction at your most successful achievement."

Then, turning to his wife, he said: "Why you look better and younger than you did before you became mine."

"I am glad you think so, dearest Stanley," she replied, tenderly.

"There cannot be a doubt about it," he rejoined. "Your father must entertain the same opinion."

"He does!" exclaimed Mr. Warburton. "And he is rejoiced to find you think so."

"Well, I have all along thought this the most satisfactory cure I ever performed," said the doctor. "Now I have no doubt about it. I wish you all good morning."

And he quitted the room rather hastily.

"I am sorry he's gone," said Stanley. "I had something rather particular to say to him on the part of Lady Talmash."

"Oh! he would have liked to hear it, I'm sure," said the squire, "for I know he has a great regard for her. But follow him down stairs quickly, and you'll catch him."

Acting on the suggestion, Stanley hurried out of the room, and caught Dr. Percival before he left the house.

The doctor appeared much interested by the message from Lady Talmash, though it was merely to tell him she was unwell, and meant to consult him on her return.

"Nothing serious, I hope, is the matter with her?" he inquired. "I may not be always as fortunate as I have been with your wife."

"Did you hear of the suicide of poor Charles Kynaston, to whom her ladyship was engaged?" asked Stanley. "He was an irreclaimable gambler, and her reproaches unquestionably drove him to the rash act. She takes the matter very much to heart, and her regrets have no doubt materially affected her health. This is the case."

"It appears more mental than bodily," said the doctor. "Well, I'll do my best. She is a charming creature, and I have a great regard for her. But I don't profess to cure a broken heart. The surest remedy would be another suitor."

"She is already provided with one—but he is rather elderly—the Comte de Clairvaux."

"De Clairvaux! I know him—a most agreeable, most accomplished gentleman. Oh! she'll get better speedily in his hands. He's a much better doctor than I am, and if he comes with her, she won't want me."

"She thinks otherwise," said Stanley.

"I suppose they will all shortly return from Nice?" remarked the doctor.

"They must have started by this time, on the homeward journey, I should think," replied Stanley. "But the Comte de Clairvaux may induce them to make a short halt at Paris. And now, let me thank you again, my dear doctor, for the great service you have rendered me."

"I really do deserve your thanks," replied the other. "Had you lost your wife, you would have lost a treasure."

"I am quite of that opinion," replied Stanley.

A slight smile played upon the doctor's good-humoured countenance.

Stanley did not notice it, but said, while taking leave of him at the door, "We shall see you here to-morrow."

"There is no reason why you should," replied the doctor; "but your wife won't dismiss me, so I suppose I *must* make my appearance."

"Certainly, your dismissal must come from her, not from me," replied Stanley, smiling.

"By-the-by, hasn't Lady Starkey a very pretty niece?" inquired the doctor.

"Rose Hylton is generally considered pretty," replied Stanley, with affected indifference.

"Is she going to be married?" inquired the doctor. "I heard so."

"Not yet, at any rate," replied Stanley.

And Dr. Percival went his way.

Stanley then returned to the boudoir, where he found Mildred alone, all the others having left the room. So he took the seat recently occupied by Sister Aline.

For a few minutes, he gazed at his lovely wife in silence, and she smiled at him sweetly the while.

"I didn't think it possible you could have regained your good looks in this marvellous manner," he said. "There must be sorcery in it."

"No, I have simply recovered my health," she replied.

"You have recovered more than your health," he said. "You have added to your charms. You seem to have bathed in the Bath of Beauty."

"Don't flatter me, I beg of you," she rejoined, with a very slight manifestation of displeasure. "I have quite lost my taste for that sort of thing."

"Nay, my admiration is genuine, and really irrepressible," said Stanley. "Surely I may say what I think of you?"

"Of course, but I am quite unaccustomed to such fine speeches, and really don't care for them. Let us turn to some one else who is pretty. How is Rose looking?"

"Just as well as when you saw her last," he replied. "But pray, don't let a thought concerning her trouble you. Now that she has heard of your surprising recovery, she indulges in no idle dreams."

"Are you quite sure of that, Stanley? I begin to feel I might be jealous. It is a very unworthy feeling, and I will subdue it if I can."

"You will have no cause for jealousy, of that I am certain, dearest Mildred," he said, earnestly. "And I hope you won't destroy your own happiness by any unjust suspicions."

Seeing he looked a little annoyed, she thought it necessary to explain her meaning.

"If it were the case, dear Stanley," she said, "I couldn't blame either you or Rose. When I thought myself on the point of death I strongly urged you to choose her as a wife, because I thought she would exactly suit you, and if you have entered into any engagement with her, I cannot blame either you or her."

"Whatever may have passed between us, all is now completely at an end," replied Stanley. "Clearly understand that Rose, herself, on hearing of your wondrous cure, positively declared it must be so. You may place implicit confidence in her. She is truth itself."

"I know it," replied Mildred. "I shall, therefore, dismiss all uneasiness, and welcome her as a sister."

"I am truly glad to hear it," replied Stanley.

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## XIX.

### DOCTOR PERCIVAL'S ADVICE TO LADY TALMASH.

A few days afterwards Lady Starkey and Rose arrived, accompanied by Lady Talmash, and came at once to Berkeley-square.

A telegram from Paris, announcing their return, had been

received by Mr. Warburton, on the previous day, so that all preparations were made for them.

They were quite amazed by the improvement in Mildred's appearance, and declared she looked handsomer than she had ever done before—thus confirming Stanley's opinion.

Their exclamations of astonishment and delight had scarcely ceased, when Dr. Percival himself came in with Stanley, and received a very warm welcome from all—especially from Lady Talmash.

"I don't know what we can do to manifest our gratitude to Dr. Percival, and our high opinion of his skill," said the squire.

"Your son-in-law and yourself have already done too much," said the doctor. "And such praises as I have just received from the ladies, are worth more to me than the richest gifts. But I am sorry to observe that Nice doesn't seem to have agreed with you all. Lady Starkey is the only one who appears to have profited by the visit."

"They have suffered from the mistral, I suppose," replied her ladyship. "But you must kindly take them in hand, doctor."

"Oh, they don't want medical aid," he said.

"Indeed, we do," they both rejoined.

"Have you left the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal de Blundeville in Paris?" asked the squire.

"No, they came with us to London," replied Lady Starkey. "They are gone to the Grosvenor to secure rooms, and will be here presently."

"Both are old friends of mine," remarked the doctor, "and I shall be rejoiced to meet them again."

This meeting took place in the drawing-room, and Dr. Percival therefore easily found an opportunity of taking Lady Talmash aside, and said to her:

"I hope your ladyship is better?"

"Not much," she replied. "Come and see me to-morrow morning, and I will explain all."

"Without waiting till to-morrow, I can tell you what is the matter with you. You reproach yourself with being the cause of Charles Kynaston's death."

"You have guessed the truth, dear doctor," she replied. "That dreadful occurrence weighs upon my spirits, and I fear will kill me. Since his death I have discovered how much I

loved him. I cannot replace him, and would now give all I possess to bring him to life again."

"Had you married him, you would not have been happy," said the doctor. "Console yourself with that reflection."

"I might not have been perfectly happy, but I should not be wretched, as I now am."

"I am told the Comte de Clairvaux is devoted to you. Is it so?"

"He has already offered me his hand."

"Then accept him. You may not love him as you did Charles Kynaston, but he will cause you no uneasiness. Were Kynaston still living I should recommend this course. Think the matter over and let me know your decision to-morrow."

"Were I to accept the comte, I feel as if I should do an injustice to Charles's memory."

"In what way? Having broken his word, Charles Kynaston had forfeited all right to your hand. The Comte de Clairvaux, I am convinced, is vastly his superior in every respect."

"No, there you are mistaken, doctor. Charles Kynaston was young, and very handsome."

"But he had a serious fault, which would have militated against your chance of happiness with him. It seems a harsh thing to say, but I really believe you are well rid of him."

"Oh, doctor, how cruel you are!" she exclaimed.

"Upon my word I don't think so," he rejoined. "Indeed, I am convinced he would have made you very unhappy had you married him."

Their discourse was here interrupted by the entrance of the comte and Sir Randal.

"Why there he is!" exclaimed the doctor. "There is the comte. Always the same air *de bon ton* about him! always the same distinguished manner! Charles Kynaston can never have been anything like that," he muttered.

Welcomed by the squire and Stanley, the new-comers were conducted by them to Mildred, who occupied a sofa with Rose at the further end of the room, and like everybody else they were enraptured by the improvement in her appearance.

"*C'est merveilleux*" exclaimed the comte, in astonishment. "I could not have believed in the change, unless I had seen it."

"Nor I," added Sir Randal.

The former invalid, who had risen at their approach, repaid their praises with the sweetest smile imaginable.

"I am entirely indebted to Dr. Percival for my wondrous restoration to health," she said.

"Ah! I always had a high opinion of him," said Sir Randal. "But I did not imagine he could work miracles."

"*C'est incroyable*" exclaimed the comte.

At this moment Stanley came up with the doctor, and presented him to the two gentlemen, by whom he was received with enthusiasm.

"I don't deserve half your commendations, gentlemen," he said. "But I own they are very gratifying to me."

"If you can perform such cures as this, doctor, you ought to have a European reputation," said Sir Randal.

"To restore health is one thing, to restore beauty is another," said the comte. "You have achieved both. *Prenez mon conseil*," he added in a mysterious whisper, "*Il faut venir à Paris, et soigner toutes nos plus belles malades.*"

"A good idea," replied the doctor, laughing. "Perhaps I may act upon it."

Just then luncheon was announced, and the squire, after begging Sir Randal to take charge of his wife, went in search of Lady Talmash. The Comte de Clairvaux offered his arm to Mildred, but she declined, and so did Rose. Presently all the party, except the two occupants of the sofa, had left the room.

"Now I can say a word to you," cried Rose.

"I shall be glad to hear anything you have to tell me," replied Mildred, regarding her very affectionately.

"First of all, I wish you to understand that I am most sincerely rejoiced at your wonderful recovery. I must ever feel deeply grateful for the interest you have taken in me, but I entreat you to believe that I have completely banished all thoughts from my mind, which you once encouraged me to indulge. Had I not done so, you would not see me here."

"I have the most perfect reliance in you, dearest Rose," replied Mildred, taking her hand; "and I still think you would have suited Stanley far better than myself. I therefore desired to make him and you amends for separating you, and wished you to understand that I was favourable to your union. But since my health has been most unexpectedly re-

stored, and I may count on a new lease of life, my feelings are naturally changed. I must retain Stanley."

"Of course," cried Rose. "I would not deprive you of him for the world. Nor should I have listened to him for a moment, had I not understood that it was your wish. But even then, I felt there was great impropriety in acting as I did, and I have blamed myself most severely for doing so. You may perfectly trust me, but if you will feel easier without me, I will go."

"No, I do not wish it, dearest Rose," rejoined Mildred. "I am quite sure you would not wrong me, either in word or deed. I believe your disposition to be perfectly truthful."

"I would rather die than injure you, dearest Mildred, and I am quite certain that equal dependence can be placed on Stanley."

"No doubt," replied Mildred. "Considering my shameful conduct towards him, he has behaved most admirably, and I owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay. To prove it fully, I ought really to have died, but this was more than I could do."

"When you quitted Nice, I know you entertained but slight hopes of recovery."

"I entertained none. But as you see, Dr. Percival has cured me. Believing, as I do, that Heaven has spared me for some good purpose, I must not thwart it. When the opportunity occurs I may be useful to Stanley, and in that belief I shall act. If at any time I should exhibit a feeling of jealousy, heed it not! It will pass instantly."

"I will do as you bid me," replied Rose, earnestly.

"After this explanation I shall feel quite easy," replied Mildred; "and will do all I can to contribute to your happiness. You must go with us to Beaucliffe."

"Now I have learnt your wishes, I can accept my aunt's invitation. But I assure you I would not have done so, unless I had felt quite sure my presence would not annoy you."

"Have no fear," replied Mildred. "I am sure we shall now get on very well together."

## XX.

## FESTIVITIES AT BEAUCLIFFE.

DR. PERCIVAL proved as successful in his treatment of Lady Talmash as he had done with Mildred, but he had fewer difficulties to contend with.

He very soon convinced her ladyship that she would be happier with the Comte de Clairvaux than with her former ill-fated suitor. Her spirits, therefore, quickly revived, and she regained her good looks.

He did not choose to question Rose, nor to dissuade her from going to Beaucliffe, as he had a very high opinion of her prudence and thought there would be no risk. Moreover, he was quite aware of the very good understanding that now subsisted between Rose and Mildred, and feared to disturb it.

After a week in town, which was spent very pleasantly but very quietly, the whole party set off to Beaucliffe and Brereton, and were distributed between the two houses, Lady Talmash and Rose being received by Mrs. Brereton, who was delighted to have them with her, and all the others—including Sister Aline—moving on to the larger mansion.

The weather was exceedingly pleasant, and the country most attractive. The squire and Lady Starkey exercised unbounded hospitality towards their guests, and did all they could to contribute to their amusement. The mornings were spent in the gardens and grounds, and the ladies came over from Brereton to play lawn tennis, or otherwise amuse themselves.

Every day there was a large party at luncheon, and excursions took place afterwards, either on horseback or *en voiture*, for there was plenty to see in the neighbourhood.

Every day there was a large dinner at half-past seven, with such cookery and such capital wine as could be got at Beaucliffe, cards, music, and dancing to follow.

The Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal, in whose honour all this festivity took place, were naturally highly gratified, but at the end of a week they began to think they were

running the squire rather too hard, and ought to take their departure.

Accordingly they made a suggestion to that effect, but worthy Mr. Warburton would not listen to them.

"I fully calculated on your spending a month with me," he said, "and shall be greatly disappointed if you don't. I shall fancy you are tired of the place."

"Tired of the place! Impossible!" said De Clairvaux. "I never stayed at a château so agreeable, so hospitable—never—*Foi de gentilhomme!*"

"I can only echo what the comte has just said," added Sir Randal. "Never have I experienced such perfect hospitality."

"You do me too much honour, gentlemen," said Mr. Warburton. "But I am glad you have seen Beaucliffe to advantage, and not as it has been of late."

"We have seen a most delightful place," said the comte, with enthusiasm; "and if you keep us here much longer, we shall never be able to tear ourselves away."

"The ladies have just arrived from Brereton," said the squire, looking forth into the garden. "Will you join them?"

"With the greatest pleasure," they replied, his friends following him through the open *porte-croisée* to the lawn, where they found Lady Talmash and Rose, who had just walked over from Brereton, escorted by Stanley.

Both looked very well, and were charmingly dressed. From the manner in which the comte was received by her ladyship, it would almost seem he was accepted. But he paid her as much homage as before, while on her part she seemed rather vain of his devoted attention.

Stanley went into the house, but presently returned with Lady Starkey and Mildred.

Never in her brightest days had the latter looked so lovely as now. On her appearance she completely threw the others into the shade—but she did not seem even conscious of her superior beauty.

Sir Randal looked at her with astonishment, and said in a low voice to Stanley:

"I never saw anything like it. I declare your wife grows more lovely every day."

Stanley seemed gratified, but made no reply.

Most of the other persons present were of Sir Randal's opinion, and the general impression was that Mildred was far handsomer than she used to be.

Beauchliffe had once more become the rendezvous of all the fashionable folks in the neighbourhood, and this morning it fully maintained its character. A great number of persons called, almost all of whom found their way to the garden, where lawn tennis was now going on.

All the old gaiety of the place seemed suddenly revived, to the squire's great delight. Mildred took no part in the amusements, but looked on and encouraged them, and the lawn soon presented a very lively scene.

Both Stanley and Rose played lawn tennis so well as to excite general admiration, and Mildred complimented the latter on her skill.

"I wish you would take my place," said Rose. "Everybody would be delighted."

"I have forgotten all about it."

"You used to play much better than I do."

But Mildred shook her head.

"I must resist temptation," she said. "I have promised never to play again, and I won't break my word."

"Nonsense!" cried Stanley, who heard what passed. "There is no harm whatever in lawn tennis."

"I don't disapprove of it," she replied. "But I won't play."

After several exciting contests, in which Rose especially distinguished herself, a large party assembled at luncheon, when there was plenty of iced champagne; but Mildred did not quit the bench on which she had taken a seat.

Here she was joined by Sister Aline, who had been walking in a different part of the garden, and when the company came forth again they had both disappeared.

## XXI.

## MILDRED VISITS THE STABLES.

Not for a long, long time, had Mildred visited the stables—formerly so attractive to her—but one day she went with Rose to look at them. Mildred was accompanied by Stanley and her father, both of whom watched her with great interest.

Arrived at the entrance to the stables, her courage seemed to desert her and she was about to turn back, but at length she yielded to her husband's persuasions and went in.

"You see what my good resolutions are worth," she said, as she entered. "I had resolved never again to put myself in the way of temptation, and here I am."

"But what harm can these horses do you?" asked her father.

"A great deal," she replied. "They may lead me into mischief."

"I don't see how," he said.

"All my former errors originated in my fondness for horses," she said; "and I had resolved never to ride again, and here I am exposing myself to temptation. I cannot look at them without longing for a ride."

"Well, pray gratify your wish," said Stanley. "You will be none the worse for a good gallop, but a great deal better."

"Stanley is quite right," said the squire. "I long to see you on horseback again, and so do a good many others."

"You tempt me very much," she cried, going up to a magnificent hunter and patting his glossy side; "but I must not yield."

"If I could ride like you I shouldn't hesitate," said Rose. "Besides, I can see no harm in it. I should like immensely to have a gallop on this horse, and should feel that the exercise would do me a vast deal of good."

"So it would," replied Mildred. "I don't doubt it for a moment."

"Why should a gallop be beneficial in one case and not in another?" said Rose.

"I'll explain," replied Mildred, gravely. "I once was passionately fond of hunting, and thought myself a first-rate horsewoman."

"So you are," said Stanley. "I'll answer for that."

"That notion made me vain—excessively vain," replied Mildred. "I was told there was no one like me in the hunting field, and I believed it. Now that I see my danger I have resolved not to expose myself again to a like temptation. Never more will I be seen on horseback—never more indulge in a gallop!"

"A very foolish resolution," said Stanley. "And I hope you won't keep it. Here is a stable full of horses, from which you may choose."

"Your own famous hunter is among them," remarked the squire.

"I know it," she replied. "But I should hesitate even to take him. I am persuaded if I begin to ride again some ill will befall me."

"Banish these feelings," said her father; "they are unworthy of you. I am surprised to find you so superstitious!"

"I cannot help it," she replied. "If I once begin I shall go on, and then there is no telling where I shall stop."

"Well—well! do as you please," said the squire.

"For my part I have no misgivings," remarked Rose, "and should very much enjoy a ride one of these days."

"Any time you like," said the squire; "and Stanley I'm sure will take charge of you."

"That he will with pleasure," he replied. "Make your own choice. The horses all want exercise."

"Take my favourite hunter, if you will," said Mildred.

"No, no," rejoined the squire. "In spite of all your boasted resolutions, I hope to see you mount him again one of these days—so I shall keep him exclusively for you."

"You are always kind," observed Mildred to her father. "Well, I must confess I am highly pleased with my visit to the stables, and shall probably come here again before long."

A couple of grooms, who had been employed in the stalls, now came forth, and one of them expressed a hope that he should soon see his young mistress again.

"Very likely you will, Tom," she replied, smiling at him as she went out. "But I can't make any positive promise."

"I hope she means to begin again," said Tom to his fellows. "We've had no ladies worth lookin' at in the field since she left off huntin'."

## XXII.

## A THUNDERSTORM IN DELAMERE FOREST.

NEXT day, a small party, hastily arranged by Stanley, and provided with horses from the squire's well-stocked stables, set out, at a tolerably early hour, on a ride to Delamere Forest.

Besides Stanley himself, who acted as leader of the expedition, the party comprised Lady Talmash and Rose, with the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal de Blundeville, and was attended by the two grooms we found in the stables on the previous day.

The ladies did not start from Beaucliffe, but from Brereton, where they were staying, and where their steeds were brought by the grooms, and both looked remarkably well in the riding-habits lent them by Mildred.

Mildred, we may mention, had been asked by her husband to accompany them, but declined, as he expected she would.

As the weather was very propitious and promised to continue fine, a delightful day was anticipated; but Mrs. Brereton, who witnessed the departure, looked grave and predicted thunder. Nobody, however, heeded her warning at the time, and the party set off in excellent spirits resolved to enjoy themselves.

Their road led them past several old halls, the owners of which were intimate friends both of Stanley and Sir Randal, but they made no calls. Many timber and plaster farmhouses—some of the larger of which had formerly been mansions and were still moated—attracted their notice. Almost all these picturesque habitations had large farmyards attached to them, with cowhouses, great barns, and orchards filled with grey, old damson trees—the fruit of which, Sir Randal said, made the most delicious puddings. Adjacent to these comfortable dwellings were rich pastures filled with cattle, promising a good supply of the cheeses for which Cheshire is famous.

As the country was rather flat and the hedges high, the views were not very extensive, but whenever a little eminence was gained, commanding the distant Mersey, near Warrington, or some sheets of water close at hand, the prospect was beautiful.

Now-a-days very little is left of the real Delamere Forest almost all the oldest trees being cleared off, and the tract cultivated. The famous chase is robbed of the red and fallow deer, which used to draw the huntsmen of former days to it in crowds, and is little better than a waste, covered with heath and abounding with rabbits. Such a scene as this did not look very inviting, and neither of the ladies could praise it.

But the point to which Stanley wished to conduct them was Eddisbury Hill, whence a magnificent view can be obtained, comprehending the wide vale of Chester, Chester itself, the Mersey, and the whole of the site of old Delamere Forest.

On the summit of this commanding height an old fortress once stood, and the remains of an ancient camp are still visible. As the party mounted the eminence, Rose noticed that the sky had darkened, and expressed her uneasiness to Stanley, who endeavoured to reassure her.

"I don't think there is any cause for apprehension," he said. "The storm will pass off."

But instead of passing off it became worse, and Mrs. Brereton's warning was fulfilled. Just as the summit of Eddisbury Hill was gained and they were admiring the wonderful prospect, a loud crack of thunder was heard, and a flash of lightning struck the ground a little in advance of the troop.

Rose, who was riding in front with Stanley, was much frightened and exclaimed, "Do let us go down and take shelter somewhere. A dreadful thunderstorm is coming on and we shall be exposed to its full violence here."

"Yes, this has quite taken me by surprise," he replied. "I didn't believe either in my mother's warning, or the threatening sky. But there is no mistake about it now. We must turn back," he called to the others.

"But where shall we find shelter?" asked Sir Randal.

"Where we can, I suppose," replied Stanley, as another clap of thunder was heard, rather louder than the first.

"I shall never be able to keep my seat if this goes on," said Rose, whose terror seemed to increase.

Lady Talmash seemed equally frightened, and turning her horse's head dashed down the hill. She was instantly followed by the comte and Sir Randal, but neither of them could overtake her or render any assistance, and both expected she would have a dangerous fall.

Fearing Rose would start in the same headlong style, and possibly come to grief, Stanley seized her bridle and restrained the steed.

Meanwhile there was no cessation in the storm; and equally alarmed with the rest, the grooms rode down the hill.

"We must find shelter somewhere," cried Rose. "There is a large tree yonder; let us get to it."

"Better no shelter at all than such as that tree will afford," said Stanley. "You see all the others have avoided it."

"I know that a tree is considered very dangerous in a thunderstorm," she replied. "But since nothing else offers I'll run the risk of being struck by lightning. Pray let go my bridle!"

Seeing she was becoming terribly alarmed, Stanley complied. Thus released she instantly dashed down the hill in the direction of the tree, and he followed.

As they came down, Sir Randal, who was the only person visible, shouted to them, and Stanley pointed to the tree. The baronet made a gesture of warning, but they paid no heed to it, and went on.

Scarcely had they reached the old oak that offered them the cover of its branches, when Stanley was obliged to help Rose to dismount, or she would have fallen. With the greatest difficulty could he sustain her in her present half-fainting state, and at the same time prevent their steeds, which were now well-nigh unmanageable, from breaking away. But he was quickly relieved from the latter embarrassment by the arrival of the grooms, who had been sent to him by Sir Randal.

"Must we stop here, sir," asked Tom, looking much frightened.

"No," replied Stanley. "Take away the horses; but bring them back as soon as the storm is over."

"Be sure we will, sir," said Tom. "You shan't have to wait."

And as he walked off with his fellow servant, he remarked, "I shouldn't mind a little danger if I had such a pretty girl as that with me."

Rose, we may mention, in her fright, had flung her arms over Stanley's shoulder, while he was necessarily obliged to support her.

But the danger apprehended by all actually did occur. The

storm seemed to draw nearer till it finally settled overhead. A louder clap of thunder than had yet been heard, was followed by an explosion like that of a bomb, and it became instantly apparent that the tree was struck; a large portion of the bark being torn from the trunk.

For a few moments Stanley fancied that both he and Rose were injured, but he soon found, to his great relief, that such was not the case. Rose screamed and became insensible, and had not quite recovered when the grooms returned. At that time she was clasping Stanley round the neck, and he could not disengage himself.

"Look there!" whispered Tom, winking at his companion.

But their attention was instantly diverted by the damage done to the tree, and they both congratulated themselves on their escape.

"I told you how it would be," said Tom, pointing to the scathed oak. "Take warnin' by this, and keep away from trees in a thunderstorm."

But the storm was now quite over, and the sky began rapidly to clear. Tom deemed it right to prepare his master for the approach of the others, and before they came up both Stanley and Rose were again on horseback—though the latter still looked exceedingly pale. Ever since the last tremendous crash, the new-comers felt sure that the tree had been struck, and were not surprised therefore to find that such was the fact.

"What an escape we have had to be sure!" cried Lady Talmash. "I wouldn't have been here when that mischief occurred."

"You would have heard such a crash as you never heard before," said Stanley. "I thought it would have deafened me. Now, what shall we do? There is a nice little inn on the way to Vale Royal. Shall we go and lunch there?"

"No—no——" replied Lady Talmash. "Let us get back as fast as we can. I am drenched through."

So they rode off, and made no stoppage till they got to Beaucliffe, where they were anxiously expected. One of the grooms was despatched to Brereton with tidings of their safe return.

## XXIII.

## GEORGETTE UNINTENTIONALLY MAKES MISCHIEF.

THAT evening Sister Aline was sitting with Mildred in her dressing-room, when Georgette, without being summoned, came in. As she looked as if she had something to tell, her mistress inquired what it was.

"I have just heard a comical little story relating to the storm of this morning from Tom, the groom," replied Georgette. "But I am not sure that madame may care to hear it."

"Oh, yes I should, very much," replied Mildred.

"Madame has heard, I suppose, that an old tree under which two persons took shelter during the storm, was struck by lightning."

"Yes, but there is nothing comical in that, rather the reverse, I think," replied her mistress.

"Tom thought the lady had fainted when he took away the horses," said Georgette; "but when he brought them back, she had recovered, and was tenderly embracing the gentleman."

"Embracing him!" exclaimed Mildred, surprised.

"Yes, she had got her arms round his neck, and he was clasping her to his breast."

"Are you certain of what you tell us?" observed Sister Aline.

"I only repeat what was told me, and cannot vouch for its truth," replied Georgette. "But I myself believe the story."

"Do you know who the pair were?" asked Mildred.

"I fancy they must have been Lady Talmash and the Comte de Clairvaux," said Georgette.

Mildred exchanged glances with Sister Aline.

"You don't think one of them was Miss Rose Hylton?" asked Sister Aline.

"Oh, no! I'm certain not," replied Georgette, perceiving the mistake she had made. "I'm quite sure Tom told me it was Lady Talmash."

Mildred did not seem half reassured.

"Are the two ladies gone back to Brereton to-night?" asked Sister Aline.

Mildred replied in the affirmative.

"Don't trouble your head about the matter," remarked Sister Aline. "It's a ridiculous invention of the groom."

"No, I believe it to be true," said Mildred. "I thought something unpleasant would come of this expedition. They both seemed so anxious about it."

"Why didn't you go with them?" asked Sister Aline.

"I should only have been in the way," replied Mildred. "Besides, I have resolved never to ride out again."

"There you are wrong," said Sister Aline. "This could not have happened if you had made one of the party."

"I'm not sure of that," replied the other. "They don't mind me. No doubt the explanation of this incident will be that Rose was so dreadfully frightened by the thunder, that she didn't know what she was about, but I don't believe it."

"Pray pardon me, madame, for the *bêtise* I have committed," implored Georgette. "I blame myself exceedingly for mentioning the circumstance to you. But I still believe the two persons were Lady Talmash and the comte."

"Make no more excuses. Where is your master? In the drawing-room?"

"No, madame," replied Georgette, looking rather embarrassed. "Monsieur and the comte have gone with the ladies in the open carriage to Brereton Hall."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mildred.

"Perhaps they may have come back by this time, madame, shall I see?"

"No, no," cried her mistress. "But you needn't stay here."

As soon as Georgette had withdrawn, Sister Aline took her friend's hand, and said to her in an affectionate tone, "Pray don't view this silly matter in a serious light. Rose must have been dreadfully frightened by the storm, and Tom, no doubt, grossly exaggerated what he beheld. As to the two gentlemen driving out with the ladies to Brereton Hall, that means nothing. But if you desire to be happy, you must really dismiss all feelings of jealousy, for which there is no cause. Rose regards you as a sister, and would never deceive you, but little circumstances will occur—as they have occurred to-day—that may throw an air of suspicion on the most blameless conduct. For my own part I don't believe half that was told by the groom to Georgette, but I quite acquit him of any desire to make mischief."

"Yes, I am sure he didn't intend that," said Mildred; "neither did Georgette—she spoke without consideration, and only meant to amuse us. I will do my best to cure myself of this causeless jealousy. It certainly does interfere with my happiness. Apart from any such feelings, I am very much attached to Rose, and regard her as a sister."

"I know it," replied Sister Aline. "Now pray attend to what I am about to say, and act upon it. You have taken a resolution not to ride on horseback again. There you are wrong. By adhering to it, you will lose a great deal of your husband's society, and voluntarily surrender your proper place by his side to others. Besides, I shall not flatter you when I say that no one here rides so well as you do. Your worthy father is of the same opinion, and constantly regrets your disappearance. By resuming equestrian exercise in moderation—mind, I say, in moderation—you will please both him and your husband."

"I will consider your counsel, dear sister," said Mildred. "But I am really afraid that the resumption of horse exercise will bring me ill luck. I know you will deem me weak and superstitious to indulge such a notion, but I cannot help it."

"What kind of ill luck do you apprehend?" asked Sister Aline.

"I know not," replied Mildred. "But if I should become as vain and foolish as I was formerly, I would not answer for myself, and I therefore think I ought to avoid temptation."

"Undoubtedly, unless you feel strong enough to resist it. But in my opinion you have obtained perfect control over yourself, and have nothing to fear."

"You really think so?"

"I do."

At this moment the door opened, and Stanley came in. His wife seemed pleased to see him.

"Georgette tells me you have been inquiring about me," he said. "I have just been to Brereton with Lady Talmash and Rose. They seemed to have quite recovered their spirits. I have promised to take them out again some early day, provided you will go with us—but not otherwise."

"I will think the matter over, and let you know my decision to-morrow."

"I've just been urging her to ride out with you," remarked Sister Aline.

"I'm very glad to hear it," replied Stanley. "Use your influence, and the difficulties will vanish. But I'm glad she did not go with us to-day, for all pleasure was spoiled by the storm."

"Was it a very bad storm?" asked Sister Aline.

"Very bad," he replied; "I never beheld a worse. Rose and myself had really a most miraculous escape from destruction, but she was well-nigh frightened to death. I shall avoid trees in future. So you may safely promise to accompany us on our next excursion."

"Will you let me ride by your side, and not leave me to the care of other persons?" asked Mildred.

"I will," he replied.

"That is a great inducement," she said. "But I can't promise now."

Stanley looked puzzled, but turning to Sister Aline, said, "I calculate on your aid." He then quitted the room.

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## XXIV.

### MILDRED AGREES TO RIDE OUT WITH STANLEY ALONE.

No one could have suited Mr. Warburton better than Lady Starkey. She quite understood his tastes and habits, and laid herself out to please him. With all the visitors she was extremely popular, being very affable and obliging, and the whole household was devoted to her. Perhaps the only person she did not really like was Sister Aline, but she always behaved to her with the greatest possible kindness and consideration, and they had never had the slightest misunderstanding. Sister Aline, indeed, had a very great respect for her.

Hitherto, Lady Starkey had maintained her good looks, and she always dressed remarkably well. Nothing had surprised her more than Mildred's remarkable recovery, and whether she was altogether pleased by it may be doubted; but at any rate she behaved very well, and allowed no sign of annoyance to appear.

For Rose her affection was quite maternal. Having

secretly calculated upon a union between her niece and Stanley, her disappointment that it was thwarted must have been excessive. Still, she indulged secret hopes that the marriage might yet take place. But these hopes were visionary. Mildred was now in perfect health, and in point of beauty surpassed Rose. But both aunt and niece, though they said nothing to each other, entertained the opinion that Rose was preferred.

Unquestionably, she was very much admired by some of the gentlemen who visited Beaucliffe, and who could not fail to be struck by her beauty and attractive manner. But she gave none of them encouragement, and the notion began to be entertained that she had some previous engagement—just as it was understood that Lady Talmash was engaged to the Comte de Clairvaux. Stanley, therefore, had no cause for uneasiness.

Mildred, as we have shown, tried to conquer her jealousy, but was not entirely successful. Whenever she became tranquil, some fresh excitement occurred, and she felt quite sure that any resolutions she might form as to self-control would be broken. In short, after a good deal of consideration, she came to the conclusion that an equestrian party would not suit her, and resolved to decline it.

Seeing Stanley on the lawn the next morning, she went out to him, and said, "I must really beg you to excuse my accompanying you and a riding party for the present. You're very good to ask me, but I think I'm best out of the way."

"Well, well! just as you please! If you would rather not go, don't. But you musn't desert me altogether."

"The very first time I can prevail upon myself to appear on horseback again, shall be with you," said Mildred to Stanley. "Have you fixed where you'll go?"

"I had thought of Vale Royal."

"Ah! that will be a charming excursion."

"I'll keep it for you, if you like, and take them to Rostherne Mere."

"No, keep Rostherne for me."

"As you please. There are twenty lovely places to which I can take you, as you know. But it is useless to decide on any of them until you have made up your mind to accompany me."

"I'll give you my decision before long," she rejoined. "But tell me why you are so anxious to have me with you? I should have thought Rose would be a more agreeable companion."

"I want to see you on horseback again," he replied; "and satisfy myself that you really can ride as well as you used to do, for I can scarcely believe it. Remember, it's a very long time since I saw you in the saddle, and you may have lost your nerve."

"I scarcely think so," she replied, confidently.

"Well, I'm glad you entertain that opinion, at all events," he rejoined. "But I shall never feel quite satisfied of your perfect restoration till I see you by my side. Your father says the same thing. 'When once she has taken a glorious gallop'—those were his words—'such a gallop as she used to take in former days, I shall be content, but not till then.'"

"Well, I've listened to what you have to say," she rejoined. "Now, hear me. My objection to riding, at least, to hunting, is that it encourages feelings of vanity and display, and these I have conquered. Why should I revive them? Why should I expose myself to temptation? I was no better, no happier, when I was constantly on horseback, but I thought more of myself and was gratified by the admiration I excited. My dear father was excessively proud of me, and encouraged me—thus increasing the mischief. All my errors are attributable to this training and to the foolish course I pursued. You saw what I was like when you first beheld me. You know what I became. There is an intoxication in the praises bestowed upon a fearless rider that turns the head, and I constantly suffered from it. Can you wonder that I had resolved never again to run so great a risk?"

"I cannot—I do not," rejoined Stanley. "But you entirely mistake me. I am not like your worthy father. I do not wish you to resume your former practices. Were you to tell me that you meant to enter the hunting-field again, I would dissuade you from doing so. But a quiet ride—such as I propose—can do no harm."

"There is no telling what it may lead to," said Mildred. "I would rather remain on the safe side. I will never hunt again. On that I am resolved."

"I do not ask you to hunt," rejoined Stanley. "I ask you merely to accompany me in my rides on horseback, and you ought not, in my opinion, to have any difficulty in complying with the request."

"I should not mind riding with you alone," said Mildred. "But I object to others."

"What can that matter?" he asked, looking rather displeased. "They wouldn't interfere with you."

"I am not so sure of that," she replied. "If I accede to your request, I must stipulate that we ride out alone."

"That would be rather awkward, and would look as if you objected to some of the others."

"I can't help that. I shan't interfere with them—they mustn't do so with me."

"Well, when will you make a start?"

"In the course of a month—but I cannot fix a day."

"Why not?"

"I still feel nervous. But I won't keep you in suspense longer than I can help."

"Now mind, you have made a promise, and must fulfil it."

"I will," she replied, hastening to the house, and entering by the French window.

A few minutes later, Lady Talmash and Rose made their appearance. They had just come from Brereton.

"What news?" inquired Lady Talmash. "Does Mildred go with us on our excursion?"

"No, he replied." "She will only ride out with me alone."

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## XXV.

### AGAIN ON HORSEBACK

"How is it that Mildred refuses to ride out with us, I wonder?" said Lady Talmash. "Can she be jealous?"

"I should think not," replied Rose. "But her feelings must have wonderfully changed. At one time, she liked nothing so much as praise for her splendid horsemanship. Now she affects to care nothing about it—but I think she does. Stanley was to take her out alone for a short ride this morning. I'm curious to hear how they got on."

"Oh! they'll get on very well, depend upon it," said Lady Talmash.

This conversation took place in the entrance-hall of Brereton, where the two ladies met, when they came down stairs and they now proceeded to the front door, which was left

open, and showed them Stanley and Mildred riding up to the house.

"There they are I declare," cried Rose. "Quite alone—no groom with them."

And the two ladies hastened forward to greet them.

Mildred looked remarkably well in her riding-habit—never better. She was likewise very well mounted, though not on her famous hunter. Both ladies told her how delighted they were to see her on horseback again, and their looks left no doubt as to their sincerity.

"Why, you are quite like your former self!" cried Lady Talmash, "only handsomer!"

"Yes, I positively declare I never saw you looking better!" exclaimed Rose. "Stanley must be congratulated on what he has accomplished."

"After such a good beginning, I hope you mean to take a gallop every morning," said Lady Talmash.

"It shan't be my fault if we don't," replied Stanley. "And I think Mildred is pleased."

"Yes, I confess I'm better satisfied than I expected to be," she replied.

"Ere long, I hope you'll take us out with you?" said Rose.

"I can make no promise," replied Mildred gravely. "I mean to go on very quietly."

"Well, follow up the course you have commenced this morning, at any rate," said Lady Talmash. "Horse exercise, I am sure, will do you good. You have always been accustomed to it."

"I shall go on, I daresay, now that I have started," rejoined Mildred. "But when I first went out this morning, I was full of uneasiness, lest I should be led into my former errors. But I soon found I was greatly changed."

"You view the matter much too seriously," said Lady Talmash.

"I don't think so," replied Mildred. "Formerly, the healthy exercise of hunting was a minor consideration with me. I thought only of display—of showing off before a crowded field. Now I can resist the temptation. At least, I hope so."

"I have no doubt of it," said Rose.

"But I don't mean to put myself to the test, if I can help it," rejoined Mildred. "Stanley has promised to look care-

fully after me when I am on horseback, and keep me out of all scrapes."

"Oh! you'll get into none," he rejoined, laughing. "But come. We must be making our way to Beaucliffe. We shall see you after breakfast."

At this moment Mrs. Brereton appeared at the door, followed by Minshull.

"Stop a minute," she cried. "I want to say a word to you."

"You will be surprised to see me on horseback again, after all I have said," exclaimed Mildred, moving towards her.

Mrs. Brereton regarded her with admiration, as did the old butler, who could not repress his delight.

"Why, you look better than you ever did; don't she, ma'am?" he cried.

"She looks exceedingly well, and I'm rejoiced to see her on horseback again," remarked his mistress.

"I'm glad you're pleased," said Mildred to the old lady. "I was rather afraid, but now all's right." Then leaning forward she added in a whisper, "No more hunting."

"I'm glad of it," said Mrs. Brereton, approving.

"Now for Beaucliffe," cried Stanley, making his way to the gate.

Aware that his daughter had ridden out that morning for the first time since her illness, Mr. Warburton was looking out for her return; and when Stanley and Mildred entered the long drive leading to the mansion, they found him there.

The smile that illumined the worthy squire's countenance as he gazed at his daughter, while holding her bridle, was delightful to see. For a moment he could not speak, but he soon recovered, and drawing near her, said, "Now, you have really gladdened my heart. I seem to behold you again as you were when all was bright. Keep as you now are, and I shall desire nothing more."

"But don't ask me to hunt again, dearest papa, for I can't obey you."

"I won't ask you to do anything that may be disagreeable to you," he rejoined. "I simply wish to express the pleasure I feel in seeing you again on horseback."

"I think we have made a most agreeable commencement," said Stanley. "We shall certainly succeed, if we are not in too great a hurry."

"Don't expect too much of me, dearest papa—that is all I ask," said Mildred.

"You have begun excellently," he rejoined; "and I am glad you have conquered your foolish prejudices."

Amongst those who welcomed Mildred on her return was Georgette. She was standing in front of the mansion with Tom the groom, and quite clapped her hands with delight as Mildred came up. Tom likewise expressed his satisfaction, though in a more decorous manner, as he assisted his young mistress to dismount. Lady Starkey was present, and knowing she should please the squire, was enthusiastic in her praise of Mildred's appearance. The Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal also came forward, and showered compliments upon her, but she escaped from them, and hurried upstairs.

"You have made a famous start, I see," said Sir Randal to Stanley.

"Yes, I have done well enough to-day," replied the other.

"But I doubt whether I shall be able to go on."

"Don't despair!" cried the comte; "don't despair!"

When Mildred came down to breakfast—after taking off her riding-habit with Georgette's aid—she met with a second warm reception, and prompted, probably, by Stanley and the squire, everybody told her she must "go on."

She smiled at the anxiety displayed, but made no promise; and those who preferred the request thought compliance doubtful.

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## XXVI.

### MILDRED CONSENTS TO RIDE OUT WITH LADY TALMASH AND ROSE.

AFTER breakfast, Mildred hastened to Sister Aline's room, as she wished to offer some explanation of her conduct, feeling certain her friend would be greatly surprised, and perhaps hurt, that she had not been consulted about the propriety of the morning ride, after her own repeated declaration that she would never be seen on horseback again.

She found Sister Aline with a book of devotions before her, and received the customary affectionate greeting. She then sat down beside her.

"I find you have been riding out with your husband this morning," said the Sister somewhat reproachfully. "I am rather surprised you did not mention your design to me."

"I was afraid you might seek to dissuade me from it," replied Mildred.

"Certainly not, if you had given your husband a promise, as I presume you had, I see no harm whatever in your going out on horseback with him. My fear has been lest you should become as passionately fond of riding as formerly, and I counselled you to leave it off altogether. As you seemed entirely to agree with me, I have said nothing more on the subject of late, considering there was no danger. Nor am I, in the slightest degree, uneasy now, provided you will promise only to accompany your husband."

"I will readily give that promise," replied Mildred. "I have no desire to ride with anyone else. But even while acting thus carefully, I feel there is a certain risk, and am bound to mention it to you. If I ride much, I may be led to commit some of my former follies. Certain feelings once ruled in my breast, and might acquire the mastery again. Were I to yield to the wild excitement of the chase, I should inevitably be carried away by it. I must leave all behind me. I must be first."

"I can quite understand the feeling," replied the other; "but it is dangerous, and must be overcome."

"Once fairly roused, it cannot be quite overcome," rejoined Mildred; "it must be gratified by triumph."

"Then you are right not to expose yourself to temptation. Rather than do so, give up all equestrian exercise."

"O, yes. I cannot tell where I shall stop. I had resolved—I will not say vowed—never to ride again, and I refused even my father, who has been dying to see me in the saddle once more. But I yielded to my husband's entreaties, and went out with him this morning, as you know. Nothing could have gone off better. No *contretemps* of any kind occurred. I enjoyed it in moderation. But should I be able to do so a second time? Should I have myself under equal control?"

"Wherefore not?" asked Sister Aline, regarding her stedfastly. "What do you really fear?"

"A sudden impulse, which might prompt me to commit some act of folly that I might ever afterwards regret. I had

some symptoms that I did not like this morning, and I am certain if a pack of hounds and their followers had passed us, I should have joined them."

"Have you not acquired greater self-control?" asked the sister.

"I think not," replied Mildred. "I did not express my fears to Stanley, and he would laughed at them had I done so. He does not believe in my weakness."

"I do not wonder at it. It seems quite inconsistent with your present character, and no one would suspect you of yielding to such a feeling, but you are evidently as impressionable as ever. My advice to you is this: decline to ride out again for the present, but do not refuse altogether, or some disagreeable consequence may ensue, which had better be avoided. Your husband may insist upon compliance with his wishes, and will probably be supported by your father."

"I think this will be the most prudent course," said Mildred. "I will offer no explanation."

The decision was just taken in time, for at the moment the door opened, and Stanley entered the room. Respectfully saluting Sister Aline, who bowed in return, he said to her:

"Of course, you have heard what a pleasant ride Mildred and I had before breakfast this morning? We must have another to-morrow morning."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," replied his wife, "but it cannot be."

"Nonsense!" he cried. "You must go. Lady Talmash and Rose will accompany us."

Mildred shook her head.

"I really can't go," she said.

Stanley seemed annoyed by the refusal, and looked from one to the other for an explanation.

"What's the difficulty?" he asked.

"I never meant to ride out every day," replied Mildred. "Besides, I told you we must always be alone."

"But you can't possibly object to the two ladies I have mentioned."

"On the contrary, I should prefer them to any other persons—if I cared for society—but, as you know, I wish to be alone. No, they must be good enough to dispense with my company to-morrow."

"May I name any other morning?"

"No, not at present. I may not be in the mood."

Stanley appeared annoyed, and looked sharply at Sister Aline, as if he thought she had been interfering with his plans.

"I alone am responsible," said Mildred.

"Then, pray, do try to make yourself agreeable," he rejoined. "Everybody wishes to ride out with you, and yet you refuse to join them, although there are plenty of horses in the stables, and you have no excuse to offer for declining."

"I throw myself on your good nature to excuse me," said Mildred. "Horse exercise has lost its attraction for me."

"I thought you enjoyed the ride this morning?" he remarked.

"So I did," she rejoined. "I enjoyed it very much. But I broke a resolution in taking it, and that spoiled the pleasure. No, I must have a little time for reflection before I go out again."

"I must talk to the squire, and act on his advice," said Stanley, as he quitted the room.

"You will have both husband and father against you," said Sister Aline.

"Yes, but I won't yield," replied Mildred. "If I once join these riding parties I must go on."

Shortly afterwards the door partly opened, and the squire, popping in his head, asked, "May I come in?"

"Certainly," replied Sister Aline, rising to give him welcome.

"You guess what brings me here, no doubt?" he said to Mildred. "Stanley wished me to use all my influence to induce you to continue your morning rides with him and the two ladies. I sincerely hope you will."

"Dear papa, I am sorry I cannot," she replied. "I gave Stanley my reasons for declining, and they seemed sufficient."

"To me they seemed the mere result of caprice," replied the squire. "You have changed your mind, that's all. You saw how delighted I was to welcome you on your return this morning. I declare positively that nothing of late has afforded me so much gratification as to see you on horseback again. That ought to have some weight with you."

"It has great weight, dearest papa. I am more anxious to please you and Stanley than any one else. I am really afraid of myself."

"Absurd!" exclaimed her father.

"Mildred has already explained her feelings to me," said Sister Aline, "and I cannot but approve of the constraint she puts upon herself. She enjoys horse exercise as much as ever, but she dare not indulge in it lest she should be led into temptation."

"Temptation to what?" asked the squire.

"To vanity and folly, as before," replied Mildred. "Under certain circumstances I cannot trust myself."

"Always be on your guard," said Sister Aline. "The Tempter may assail you in some new form, and you may not have strength to resist. Be on your guard, I repeat."

"There is no danger now that I can discern," said the squire, "and if there were, I firmly believe you have strength to resist it. But it is best to be on the safe side, and since you attribute your former follies to the excitement of the chase, do not indulge in it again, lest like results should follow. But I repeat there is no danger, in my opinion."

Mildred's firmness was put to another proof, for the door again opened, and Lady Talmash and Rose came in, and immediately rushed up to her.

"Have we unintentionally offended you in any way?" cried Lady Talmash.

"I always persuaded myself you liked me," added Rose.

"So I do," replied Mildred; "I am excessively fond of you."

"Then prove your regard by riding out with us to-morrow morning. We are come to ask you in person, and shall be mortified beyond measure if you refuse."

"We'll take the greatest possible care of you," said Lady Talmash. "No harm shall happen. That I engage."

"I'm quite sure of it," said Mildred.

"Then what do you fear?" cried Rose. "You trust yourself to Stanley, who isn't half so careful as we are. I appeal to Mr. Warburton if such is not the fact. Would you not confide your daughter to us, sir?"

"Most certainly, without the slightest misgiving," he replied.

"After such an assurance I cannot hesitate," said Mildred. "I shall be delighted to ride with you to-morrow morning. But my present consent is not to bind me to any other day."

"We hope it will!" cried Rose. "But do just as you please."

The laughter that followed this unlooked for, but satisfactory arrangement, seemed to have summoned Stanley, for he once again entered the room, and, marching up to his wife, took her hand, and said to her :

“ You have acted exactly as I could have wished.”

“ I have really tried to please you,” said Mildred.

“ And you have perfectly succeeded,” he replied.

“ May I be allowed to form one of the party ?” said the squire.

“ Certainly, dearest papa,” replied Mildred. “ I was just going to ask you.”

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## XXVII.

### A DANGEROUS FALL.

BEFORE morning two other persons were added to the party. These were the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal. On hearing of the plan these gentlemen were determined not to be left out, and made an appeal to Mildred, to which she at once acceded.

“ I told you how it would be,” she said to Stanley. “ Unless we kept the thing exclusively to ourselves, we must take everybody.”

“ Yes, you were quite right,” he replied ; “ but I’m sure we shall have a pleasant party.”

“ Oh, I’m quite reconciled to the present plan,” she rejoined ; “ only it’s not my plan.”

Next morning she came down rather before the appointed time, attired for the ride, and attended by Georgette, and waited in the hall till the gentlemen assembled.

Already, Tom, the groom, had been sent over to Brereton with a couple of steeds for the other ladies ; and now the rest of the horses were brought round. Presently all the gentlemen made their appearance, looking in very good spirits, and as if the early hour suited them.

The squire was in high good humour, and had something cheery to say to everybody. With his daughter he was extremely well pleased, and took care to let her know it. Moreover, the morning was very fine, and that was a great point.

"Last night I was very much afraid of wet," he said, "in which case our excursion must have been postponed. But we are highly favoured."

"Indeed we are," replied Mildred; "we shall have a charming ride."

In a few minutes all had mounted, and the little troop, headed by Mildred and Stanley, was proceeding along the drive to Brereton.

"Well, I hope you don't regret complying with my request," said Stanley to his wife. "We have really a finer day than yesterday, and I don't think I ever saw the park look more charming."

"I am greatly tempted to take a gallop," she replied; "but I think I had better restrain myself."

"I'll insure you against a fall," he rejoined, laughing. "On with you."

Mildred, however, did not act upon the suggestion, but held back her steed. "I'm frightened," she said.

"Frightened of what?" he asked, regarding her in astonishment.

"I don't know," she replied. "But I fancy if I let the horse go he will run away with me."

"Ridiculous! dismiss all fear and send him on!" he cried. "I'll keep near you."

"What are you talking about?" said the squire, who was close behind.

"Mildred wants to have a gallop," replied Stanley, "but is afraid of a fall."

"Then don't let her take it," replied the squire. "Much as I should like to see a good gallop, I shouldn't like to see it finish in that way."

"I'll act on your advice, dearest papa," she rejoined.

But her spirited courser did not seem satisfied with the arrangement, and began to pull very hard at the bridle.

"You'll be obliged to let him go," said Stanley. "Whatever the squire may say, I think a gallop will do you good. Don't be afraid."

"I shan't be able to check this mad horse much longer if he pulls so hard," she exclaimed.

And as the words were uttered the excited animal broke away, and went off at full speed. Finding she had lost all control of him, Mildred looked seriously alarmed.

Stanley kept as near her as he could, and tried to catch hold of the bridle, but his efforts seemed still further to excite the ungovernable steed. All those behind began to be alarmed, and the squire exclaimed, "I'm afraid we shall have an accident."

It was now quite clear that Mildred's steed was no longer under control, nor could Stanley keep up with his wife. The two grooms, who were following in the rear, would have pressed forward, but the squire felt they would do more harm than good, and kept them back.

Had Mildred possessed her former strength of nerve, there would have been no cause whatever for apprehension, but it was clear she did not, and Stanley soon became as much alarmed as the squire.

The occurrence took place in the drive leading to the mansion, and, fortunately, there was nothing whatever in the way. The only possibility that occurred to Stanley and the squire was that the two ladies might come from Brereton Hall to meet them, and this actually occurred. As Mildred's steed was galloping furiously on, every instant gaining upon Stanley, Lady Talmash and Rose appeared in sight.

They were nearly a mile off, and coming along very slowly, followed by Tom, who soon perceived what was the matter, and told them he feared his young mistress's horse had run away with her. At first they could scarcely believe it, but they soon became satisfied that the information was correct.

"I'm afraid you are right, Tom," cried Lady Talmash. "what ought we to do under the circumstances?"

"Shall we go on?" asked Rose.

"No, turn round, and ride slowly back," replied Tom. "Unless the horse is stopped before, I'll see what I can do when it comes up."

Utterly unable to control her steed, Mildred was obliged to let him dash on. He had now become quite infuriated, and it seemed almost certain an accident would occur.

Stanley shouted to Tom, and the latter replied, though not knowing what to do. At this crisis, as may be imagined, the greatest consternation prevailed on all sides, and Tom, driven almost to his wit's end, resolved to make a desperate effort to stop the horse. Accordingly, he waited till the runaway steed and its fair rider drew near, and then made a bold attempt to catch the bridle, but failed.

Daunted by his ill success, neither of the two ladies came to Mildred's aid, but they remarked that she firmly maintained her seat, and hoped, therefore, that she might escape a fall.

About a hundred yards further on there was a gate on the right communicating with the park, which Mildred had often cleared, and she now managed to direct her steed towards it, fancying she should do better on the greensward than in the road. The horse made the spring, but his foot struck on the topmost rail, and he fell very unpleasantly, throwing his fair rider over his head.

The accident, which was witnessed by everybody, caused a shout of terror from the beholders.

In another instant, Stanley, who was not far behind, came up, and would have leaped the gate at once, but seeing Mildred on the ground, and fearing he might do mischief he got over cautiously, and went to her assistance.

He found her in a state of insensibility, but could not judge from her appearance whether she was much hurt, or merely suffering from the effect of fright.

Hoping it might only prove the latter, he knelt down by her on the ground, and slightly raising her head supported it on his knee.

Presently she opened her eyes and seemed to recognise him, but the next instant she again became quite insensible.

The accident, as we have stated, was witnessed with general alarm, and several persons hastened to the spot. All of them left their horses at the gate with the grooms.

Like Stanley, her father knelt down beside her, and taking her hand, tried to restore her to consciousness, but without effect. He then directed Tom to ride back as fast as he could to Beaucliffe House and send the carriage, which done medical assistance must be procured.

All these directions were promptly attended to, and such expedition used that almost before it seemed possible the carriage made its appearance, and Mildred, who still remained in a state of insensibility, was placed in it under the care of Lady Talmash and Rose.

Nor was it long before Tom came back with Mr. Newton the surgeon, who on seeing Mildred declared she had met with a most dangerous fall, and he feared had sustained some very severe internal injury.

On arriving at Beaucliffe she was still partially insensible and being taken at once to her room, was attended by Sister Aline and Georgette, both of whom were dreadfully distressed by the accident that had befallen her.

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## XXVIII.

## MILDRED'S LAST INJUNCTION TO ROSE.

SOME little time elapsed before Mildred opened her eyes, and at first it was evident she did not comprehend what had happened. She had been placed on a couch, and Sister Aline and Georgette were standing on either side, and signed to her to remain quiet.

At length she noticed Mr. Newton, who came forward, and the sight of him seemed to explain matters.

He presented a restorative to her, and Georgette slightly raised her head while she swallowed a portion of it.

The effects of the draught were speedily manifest, and she remarked in a low voice, "I have had a fall from my horse, have I not? I recollect something about it."

"You have," replied Mr. Newton; "and have been a good deal shaken. Keep as quiet as you can."

"We will take every care of you," said Sister Aline.

"Have you felt any pain in the chest?" asked Mr. Newton.

"Yes, I feel some difficulty in breathing," she replied.

"Then don't exert yourself in the least," he rejoined.

"Am I in any danger?" she asked, looking inquiringly at him. "Don't conceal the truth from me."

"I hope not," replied Mr. Newton. "But it is quite impossible to say at present. You have had a very serious fall."

"I thought so," she replied. "But I must again ask you—is my life in danger?"

"I cannot tell," he replied. "I am not yet certain of the extent of the injuries you have received."

"I will conceal nothing from you dearest Mildred," said Sister Aline, regarding her with the most affectionate concern. "You are in the greatest danger, and it will be well for you to prepare."

"I trust I am fully prepared, dearest sister," replied Mildred; "and I am quite resigned to the will of Heaven."

Here Georgette turned aside her head, and burst into tears.

"I have one request to make of you, dearest sister, and I am sure you will grant it," said Mildred. "Do not leave me till the last."

"I will not," replied the other, earnestly.

"I have always had a foreboding of late, as you are well aware," pursued Mildred, "that I should die from a fall from my horse, and my apprehension will now be realised."

"Alas!" ejaculated Sister Aline.

Again Georgette's sobs were audible.

"Restrain yourself," said Mr. Newton to her.

Just then the door opened, and the squire and Stanley came in, and drew near the bed. Mildred seemed pleased to see them.

Mr. Warburton attempted to address his daughter, but his accents were broken, and his eyes blinded by tears. Stanley's feelings were under better control, but he was much moved.

"You are very kind to come to see me," said Mildred.

"How do you feel, my darling child?" asked her father.

"I don't suffer much pain, dearest papa," she rejoined.

"But I feel all is over with me."

"Oh! you alarm yourself unnecessarily," he said, and he added in a low voice, "I have telegraphed to Dr. Percival to come to see you at once, and feel sure he will obey the summons. He will be here this afternoon."

"The information does me good," she replied.

Stanley had not yet spoken, but his looks expressed the greatest solicitude. He now took the squire's place, and said to his wife very earnestly, "Don't be alarmed, dearest Mildred. You're not so much hurt as you suppose. Of that I'm certain."

"You mean to cheer me, Stanley, but I can't be deceived," she replied. "I've got my death blow. I shan't live many hours."

"I hope you may live many years," he rejoined.

"No, no, all is over with me," she replied. "But I do not grieve." She then drew him nearer to her, and whispered, "You will soon be free to act as you think proper, and can wed whom you please, But do not hesitate in your choice. Take Rose."

"Is that your real wish?" he asked in the same low tone.

"It is," she rejoined. "I have ever felt I was in your way. But you will now be effectually relieved of me."

"Do not speak thus, I implore you!" he rejoined. "You cut me to the heart. Far better you should live. I will make you as happy as I can."

"Death alone can make me happy, for life has lost its charms. Act as I have told you."

Stanley made no answer. This conversation was not overheard, since those who were present at the time had withdrawn to another part of the room.

At this moment Lady Talmash and Rose entered, and Stanley stepped on one side to allow them to approach the sufferer, both of whom were greatly touched by her looks of resignation, and could not repress their tears.

"I have left a message for you with Stanley," said Mildred, taking Rose's hand. "Come nearer and I will tell you what it is."

As no reply was made she repeated the order.

"The injunction shall be obeyed," said Rose.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Starkey and Mrs. Brereton—the latter of whom had been hastily summoned—entered the room, and were much affected by the sight of Mildred. They wished to remain with her, but Sister Aline besought them not to do so, and the request being seconded by Mr. Newton, they complied, and proceeded to an adjoining room, where they could be immediately summoned, if necessary. Having administered a few drops of some stimulant, Mr. Newton likewise retired. At her own express wish, no one was now left with Mildred, except Sister Aline and Georgette. But any of the others could be instantly summoned, if required.

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## XXIX.

### DEATH OF MILDRED.

No sooner was the room cleared than Sister Aline knelt down beside the couch, and prayed fervently for a few minutes, after which she arose, and taking Mildred's hand, asked if she had any confession to make to her.

"None whatever," was the reply. "All my sins have been already disclosed and sincerely repented of, and I trust I shall obtain pardon, I have prayed for an easy ending, but I do not expect it. The anguish I now endure must increase rather than diminish. I therefore trust my parting may be brief."

"What is bodily suffering, dearest sister, compared with that of the soul? Rejoice that your breast is no longer torn by remorse. May you be absolved from all your sins, and placed by our Redeemer on His right hand in the midst of His elect!"

"Amen!" ejaculated Mildred. "At this supreme hour I feel how much I owe you, dearest sister. Without you I had been inevitably lost."

"If you have yet more to suffer—as it may be—dearest sister," said the other, "bear it with patience and resignation. Trust in Divine mercy, and at the hour of your departure you will be received into mansions of eternal bliss!"

"Amen!" again ejaculated Mildred. "I cannot kneel," she added, in feeble accents, "or I would beg you to lift me from my couch that I might pray. I do not think I shall last long."

Georgette, who had been kneeling in a different part of the room, but was now looking on most anxiously, said, "Shall any one be summoned?"

"Only my father," replied Mildred.

Georgette quitted the room noiselessly, and almost immediately returned with Mr. Warburton.

"I fear your beloved daughter is dying, sir," she said to him, in a low tone, as they came.

Stepping quickly to the couch, Mr. Warburton took Mildred's hand, and gazed at her pallid countenance.

"I am glad you are come, dearest father," she said. "Give me your blessing!"

"Willingly, my dear child!" he replied, in a voice half suffocated by emotion. "May Heaven bless you!"

"And you forgive me all the pain I have caused you?" she asked, regarding him most anxiously.

"I have long since forgiven you. I only fear I have not been able to make you as happy as I could have wished."

"You have been a great deal too good to me, dearest father," she rejoined, "and I cannot thank you sufficiently."

I have not deserved your kindness, but that ought to increase my gratitude, and it does so. Farewell, for ever!"

"Farewell! dearest child!" he exclaimed. "Shall I call in the others?"

"Not till all is over," she rejoined. "You will not have long to wait."

At these words, Sister Aline, who had been kneeling beside the couch, arose, and, approaching the dying penitent, said, "Farewell! dear sister. May you be received in the place of salvation! May the gates of everlasting life be opened to you. And may you be admitted into the glory of the heavenly kingdom, through the grace and merits of our Saviour!"

For a few minutes Mr. Warburton's eyes were blinded. When he regarded his daughter again, an inexpressibly sweet smile still played upon her countenance, but the smile was fast fading away. She was gone! Sister Aline and Georgette were both on their knees beside the couch.

"O, my dear, dear child!" groaned the old gentleman. "Art thou, indeed, taken from me? For many years thou hast been the chief joy of my life: now, I have lost thee for ever!" And he struck his breast in despair.

"Console yourself, sir," said Sister Aline, in tones well calculated to soothe him. "She is saved."

"You believe so?" he asked.

"I am perfectly assured of it," was the reply.

"Bring no one in for the present," said the old gentleman, kneeling down beside his lifeless daughter.

After praying fervently for some minutes, he rose, kissed her hand, and proceeded slowly to the door. Before going forth, he turned to look again at her who had been dearest to him on earth, and then, with a groan departed. Immediately afterwards, the others were admitted, and a most harrowing scene ensued, for all were most powerfully and painfully affected.

The person who seemed to suffer most was Stanley himself. He walked up quickly to the couch on which the body of his wife was lying, and taking her hand pressed it to his lips, but unable to bear the emotions that crowded to his breast, he fell back almost immediately, and rushed out of the room. All the others suffered in more or less degree, and some seemed much hurt that they had not been summoned earlier; but it was explained to them that the dying lady's injunctions were

strictly acted upon. She had only desired to have her father and Sister Aline with her at the last. But all were struck by the extraordinary beauty of the spectacle presented to them. A smile still played on those death-pale features—a smile such as is rarely beheld—and all agreed that she looked lovelier than in life.

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## XXX.

## DR. PERCIVAL ARRIVES AT BEAUCLIFFE.

DR. PERCIVAL obeyed Mr. Warburton's summons, and arrived at Beaucliffe late in the afternoon. Mr. Newton, who was still at the house, saw him in the first instance, and described the accident that had occurred to Mildred, explaining that her recovery was impossible. The doctor next saw poor Mr. Warburton, whom he found in the deepest distress, and after doing his best to console him, went with him to the chamber of death. Both Sister Aline and Georgette were in the room at the time, but they immediately retired. The same impression was produced upon Dr. Percival as on all others. He had never beheld aught so beautiful, and stood gazing like one entranced. A few flowers were placed upon the pillow on which the lovely head rested, and the arms were crossed upon the breast, as in a recumbent statue; but the features were entirely unchanged, and retained their angelic expression, the hue of the skin being white as marble. The agonised father gazed at her for a moment, but unable to bear the sight, turned away and wept. While contemplating the placid features of the departed, Dr. Percival could not help reflecting on her sad fate. Brilliant as had been her opening career, it was extremely brief, and her married life was destroyed—then came an illness that brought her almost to death's door—and when he himself had restored her to health and beauty, how soon afterwards was she taken away! These reflections filled him with pity.

"She had everything that can constitute worldly happiness," he thought; "a most indulgent father, who lived only for her; a large fortune; a husband, to whom she was supposed to be attached, and who must have been devoted to her; extraordinary beauty and fascination; wondrous skill in

horsemanship ; and a hundred other accomplishments. Yet all went for nothing. Love of admiration spoiled all. Fortunately, she saw through her errors, and became a sincere penitent. Alas ! how much happier might have been her life had it been properly regulated !”

“What are you thinking of, doctor ?” asked Mr. Warburton, who had seated himself near the couch.

“Of your daughter’s transcendant beauty, sir,” replied the doctor.

“What good has her beauty done her ?” groaned the old gentleman. “It has not brought her long life, or happiness—that is certain. Of late she has had a strong presentiment that she should be killed by a fall from her horse. In consequence, she left off riding. Yet this morning she yielded to persuasion, rode forth, and there she lies.”

“To whose persuasion did she yield, sir,” asked the doctor. “Not to yours, I am sure.”

“To her husband’s,” replied Mr. Warburton. “He laughed at her fears, and insisted on her going out with him.”

“He will never forgive himself now for doing so,” exclaimed Stanley, who had entered the room unperceived, and stood behind them. “But who could suppose that the acknowledged first horsewoman in Cheshire would die in this manner ? I did not believe she was in the slightest danger, or I would not have let her go forth. I thought she had allowed some superstitious fears to get the better of her judgment, and that these fears ought to be overcome, and Lady Talmash and Rose Hylton were of the same opinion. That was the cause of my insisting, and I now bitterly regret it.”

“It was Fate,” cried Mr. Warburton.

“It looks like it, I confess,” said Dr. Percival.

Then observing that Mr. Warburton had sunk into a chair, seemingly overwhelmed with grief, he said to Stanley :

“We must get him away, or he will be completely prostrated.”

But just as they raised him, Sister Aline returned with her attendant, and said : “Pray let Mr. Warburton stay a few minutes longer.”

“I dare not,” replied the doctor. “He must be removed from this painful scene, or I cannot answer for the consequences. To-morrow, I hope, he may be able to come again.” So saying, he and Stanley took each an arm, and

bore the poor old gentleman to the door, where he stopped for a moment to look back at his beloved daughter before going forth.

"Alas! alas! this is a great trial to him," said Sister Aline. "He suffers more than any of the family."

"No doubt of it," replied Georgette.

Shortly afterwards Lady Starkey came in, accompanied by Lady Talmash and Rose. They brought with them a few more choice flowers, which they placed upon the bed.

"We are come to beg you to say a prayer for the departed, while we kneel beside her," said Lady Starkey.

Sister Aline expressed her willingness to do as they requested, and they all knelt round the bed, while she read forth the following prayer:

"Grant, O Lord! that while we lament the departure of this Thy servant, we may always remember that we are most certainly to follow her. And give us grace to prepare for the last hour by a good life, that we may not be surprised by a sudden and unprovided death, but be ever watching, that when Thou shalt call we may with the Bridegroom enter into eternal glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!"

There was something in Sister Aline's tender accents that gave a most soothing effect to this prayer, and not one of the listeners but was deeply moved by it. They almost expected that some ceremonial would be performed at this time, but nothing of the sort was attempted.

When those who knelt round the couch arose, each took Sister Aline's hand and kissed it, and Lady Starkey said to her, "It will always be a most satisfactory reflection that you have been able to accomplish the good work you had resolved to do."

"Yes, my task is nearly done," said the sister. "I shall see her placed in the tomb, and shall then retire for ever to the Retreat."

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## XXXI.

### THE FUNERAL.

MR. WARBURTON sent a message by Stanley to the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal de Blundeville, who were still in

the house, entreating them not to depart, as their society would be the greatest possible comfort to him as soon as he was able to come down stairs, and after consulting Lady Starkey, they agreed to remain. The poor squire was now entirely in the hands of Dr. Percival, and esteemed himself most fortunate in having such good advice.

"If you had not been with me at this terrible time, doctor, I feel I should have sunk," he said; "and I hope you will remain with me till after the funeral."

"I should be very sorry to leave you just now, Mr. Warburton," said the doctor; "and at any personal sacrifice I will stay with you for a few days. However, I hope and trust by that time I shall be able to set you right. But you must not dwell on this sad event more than you can help. I know you will say your feelings are not under your own control, and that you cannot always answer for yourself. But my orders must be strictly obeyed. You must not go again to your daughter's room."

"Oh, dear doctor," supplicated the poor squire, "do not debar me from that sad satisfaction."

"Well, you may go to-morrow, but I confess I shall feel extremely uneasy about you."

"I hope you will accompany me, doctor."

"From my recent experience I fear I shall not be of much use," replied the doctor. "However, we shall see how you are to-morrow."

Just then the door opened, and two clergymen were ushered into the room. These were the Rev. Mr. Hatton, Vicar of Beaucliffe, and the Rector of Thorne. Both were elderly men, and pleasant companions, of whose society the squire was ordinarily very fond. He immediately rose from his seat to greet them, but it was with a very sorrowful countenance. After presenting Dr. Percival to his visitors, who both seemed pleased to meet him, Mr. Warburton begged them to be seated, and resumed his easy-chair, while the doctor sat down beside him.

"It is very kind of you to come to me, my good friends," said the old gentleman. "I have had a very severe blow from which I shall long suffer, if I ever entirely recover from it."

"We would fain offer you all the consolation in our power," said Mr. Hatton. "I know not when I have been more

grieved and shocked than by the sudden death of your beloved daughter, just when she had been so wonderfully restored to health by the skill of Dr. Percival."

"You are very good to speak of me in such terms," said the doctor.

"They are richly deserved, sir," said the Rector of Thorne, Then turning to the squire, he added, "This sad accident has been a cause of real affliction to your numerous friends, Mr. Warburton. They were well aware that your chief hopes of happiness were centred in your daughter, and will quite understand the anguish you must have endured." Here he received a look of caution from Dr. Percival. "However, we sincerely hope you will not take her loss much to heart."

"That is my advice to Mr. Warburton," said the doctor. "He has been a most affectionate father, as we all know, but he must not sacrifice himself. He must not give way too much to grief, or we shall lose him as well as his daughter."

"And we cannot spare him," cried Mr. Hatton.

"No, I don't know any man who would be a greater loss to the whole county than Mr. Warburton," said the rector. "He is universally beloved and respected, and we hope and pray that he will live for us, if not for himself."

"I am sincerely obliged to you, gentlemen, for your good wishes," replied the squire, brightening up a little, "and if anything can restore me, it is such kind expressions as you use. But I must needs say a word in regard to the funeral. I have left the arrangement of that melancholy business entirely to my son-in-law, Mr. Stanley Brereton."

"We are quite aware of it, sir," replied Mr. Hatton, "and we understand it will take place at the end of the week."

"On Saturday," said Mr. Warburton. "It is my wish that it should be strictly private. But I hope you will officiate, sir, in conjunction with Mr. Hatton," he added, to the rector.

"I have already expressed my anxious desire to do so," replied the other.

At Dr. Percival's express request, the interview was not prolonged, and the two reverend gentlemen went down stairs to the ladies, with whom they remained for some time in conversation. They were then interrupted by a message from Stanley, who begged them to come to him in the library. They obeyed, and found him with Mr. Lacy, an undertaker of

Chester, and after a little conversation they proceeded to the church—Mr. Warburton's wishes being then fully explained, all preparatory arrangements were made. From the church Stanley and Rose repaired to the chamber of death. Sister Aline and her attendant were still watching and praying by the body, which was covered with freshly-gathered flowers, and looked as saintly and beautiful as ever. The two divines were greatly struck by the sight, and deeply affected. Mr. Lacy did not advance till they had retired, but though accustomed to such scenes, he was greatly moved. Stanley, who stood at a little distance, had great difficulty in maintaining his firmness. Before leaving the room, both clergymen spoke a few kindly words to Sister Aline. Stanley likewise informed her that she would not see Mr. Warburton that day.

"I did not expect to see him," she replied. "I hope he is somewhat better."

"Not much, I fear," replied Stanley. "Dr. Percival is constantly with him. I shall not feel easy till the funeral is over."

Mr. Lacy remained for a short time after the others, and then took leave most respectfully of Sister Aline. At their request the Comte de Clairvaux and Sir Randal were permitted to see the unfortunate lady, and were taken to the room in which she was lying by Lady Starkey. They were accompanied by Lady Talmash and Rose. Like all who had preceded them, they were greatly struck by the spectacle, and almost overpowered. Till they beheld her in death neither of them had supposed Mildred was so beautiful. They now regarded her with astonishment and admiration. Lady Starkey said nothing to them, but allowed them to form their own opinion. The Comte remarked, "I have never beheld such a beautiful sight before." And Sir Randal was of the same opinion.

By Dr. Percival's advice, Mr. Warburton did not come down stairs, but received his friends in his own room. He saw his beloved daughter's remains once more, and then she was placed in the coffin, which was half filled with flowers. But he was obliged to be removed by force, and uttered a loud cry when dragged away. It was a most heart-rending scene, and it was extremely fortunate that Dr. Percival was present at the time. But for him Lady Starkey felt certain that the poor squire would have died. The interest respecting Mildred

at this juncture was extraordinary. All that had formerly been felt respecting her seemed revived. The house was beset by callers, who were received by Lady Starkey and Stanley, for the poor squire was unequal to the effort, and in some instances deputed Dr. Percival to see the visitors. No doubt, the few days left of the week passed in a most melancholy manner. Still, those staying in the house did not depart, but seemed determined to remain over the funeral. At length the sad day arrived. The inner coffin had been closed the day before. Sister Aline had said her last prayers over the body of her departed friend, and had exerted all her strength to maintain her firmness, but with very imperfect success. It had been Mr. Warburton's especial request that his daughter's funeral should be strictly private. But the wish could not be fulfilled. On the contrary, the little church was crowded. Not only the whole of the large household was in mourning, but the whole of the numerous tenantry and their families; while all the worthy squire's friends desired to be present, and could not be refused. Of course, the chief mourners were Stanley and Mr. Warburton, but Sister Aline was likewise conspicuous.

Stanley bore his grief firmly, but Mr. Warburton never raised his head, and on him every eye was fixed. Dr. Percival was with him, and watched him carefully. The coffin, covered with a black velvet pall edged with silver, was placed near the altar, and not far from the entrance to the vault, which was open. The service was admirably performed by the two divines, and in the sermon preached by Mr. Hatton, he spoke with great feeling of the afflicted father. At this juncture, there was not a dry eye in the church, but Mr. Warburton's face was buried in his handkerchief. At length the sad ceremonial was ended, but not for some time after was the church cleared, for very many persons wished to view the coffin more closely. When it was borne to the vault, Mr. Warburton arose, and, taking Dr. Percival's arm, followed it. But he could not remain, and after seeing it placed, returned to the mansion.

Among the few who entered the vault was Sister Aline, but she did not go there until the church was quite cleared. She was attended by Georgette. Stanley was there at the time, but he bowed and quitted the sombre spot as she entered. It was lighted up by a few tapers, but these were sufficient. Her object was prayer, and to bid farewell for

ever to her friend. For the present, the coffin was still left upon the bier, which was standing in the middle of the vault. Georgette threw down a cloak on the floor, and on this Sister Aline knelt. During the interval, Georgette remained at the door of the vault, and after the lapse of some quarter of an hour, she came to warn her mistress that some persons were approaching. Sister Aline immediately arose, uttered a few valedictory words, let fall her veil, and passed out of the vault. Those who entered at the same moment were Lady Talmash and Rose, but they did not attempt to stop her. All her preparations had been made for immediate departure, and nothing now remained to do except to bid farewell to Lady Starkey. Sister Aline had begged that this final interview might be private, and the request was granted. What passed between them matters not, except that her ladyship behaved with the utmost kindness, and was much affected.

"We shall probably never meet again in this world," said Sister Aline, "but I shall ever remember you in my prayers. I cannot sufficiently thank you for your extraordinary kindness to me—kindness that has left an ineffaceable impression on my heart. Farewell! May Heaven bless you!"

On quitting Lady Starkey, Sister Aline entered a carriage that was waiting for her, and, attended by Georgette, drove to Chester, whence she proceeded by rail to Newhaven, and without delay embarked for Dieppe. On arriving there she immediately entered the Retreat, telling the Lady Superior and the sisters, who warmly welcomed her, that she would never leave them more. Georgette was amply rewarded for her faithful attendance. Before parting with her, her mistress bestowed upon her a very handsome sum of money, which subsequently formed her marriage portion. Not long did Sister Aline survive Mildred. Her strength suddenly forsook her, and she died in less than a month after her return to the Retreat.

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## XXXII.

### AN EVENT THAT MAY HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

A HAPPIER period, we rejoice to say, has, at length, arrived. Our worthy squire has recovered from the dangerous illness caused by the loss of his beloved daughter, and

is now in as good health as he can ever expect to be. Lady Talmash has become Comtesse de Clairvaux. The marriage took place in Paris, and Lady Starkey and Rose, with Stanley and Sir Randal de Blundeville, were present on the occasion.

The union promises extremely well, for the pair are exactly suited to each other. The comte has the greatest admiration for his wife, whom he thinks one of the most charming persons he ever met; while, owing to his distinguished manners and perfect good breeding, he suits her infinitely better than a younger man unaccustomed to the best society, like poor Charles Kynaston, would have done. They remained for some time in Paris, at the Hôtel Continental, and entered into all the amusements of the gay city.

Stanley's union with Rose may now be regarded as settled, and will, in fact, take place, with the full approval of Mrs. Brereton, Mr. Warburton, and Lady Starkey, in six months after Mildred's decease. We shall, therefore, hasten on, and come at once to the period when the preparations for the marriage are completed.

The Comte and Comtesse de Clairvaux, who have been invited, have just arrived from Paris, and Sir Randal is expected. At Beaucliffe all traces of gloom have disappeared, and, owing to Lady Starkey's judicious treatment the worthy squire has completely regained his former cheery look.

The important day finds all prepared. Stanley, who is staying at Brereton Hall, comes over betimes, bringing with him his mother and a couple of friends, Sir Richard Hyde and Captain Leigh, who are intended to serve as his best men. The four bridesmaids, all of whom are uncommonly pretty, are staying at the house, and are now just finishing their toilettes. The bride has already come down stairs, and looks quite charming. The sun shines brilliantly, and everything appears most propitious.

At eleven o'clock the wedding party entered the church, already filled with well-dressed company. The bride is leaning on the arm of Mr. Warburton, and attended by her four lovely bridesmaids, each bearing a large bouquet. She walks along the crowded aisle towards the altar, while the wedding hymn is sung by the choir, the organ being played by Mrs. Hatton. When she arrives at the chancel, the bridegroom,

who is standing there with his two friends, comes forward to meet her, and the service is immediately commenced by Mr. Hatton, who is assisted by the Rector of Thorne. Mr. Warburton gives the bride away, while Lady Starkey stands beside him. The pair are then joined together, and both feel it to be the happiest moment of their lives. Hand-in-hand, they then moved to the altar, while the psalm is sung, and all formalities are completed.

None of the numerous company depart, but stay to offer warm congratulations as the bride and bridegroom proceed to their carriage, the path outside being strewn with flowers. The wedding breakfast is sumptuous, and all the guests (among whom is our old acquaintance, Sir John Lambert) are very lively. As far as can be discerned, no painful recollections haunt our worthy squire. He predicts a very happy future for the newly-wedded pair, and we rejoice to say that his good wishes have hitherto been fulfilled.

The honeymoon was spent in North Wales—spent most delightfully—and when the happy pair returned they yielded to the squire's entreaties, and instead of taking up their abode at Brereton Hall, which was quite ready for them, came to Beaucliffe.

It would seem as if Stanley were doomed to be defeated on this point. Mr. Warburton *will* have him at Beaucliffe; while Lady Starkey is so fond of her niece, who suits her exactly, that she is unwilling to part with her. So there they are still, and likely to remain.

But after all, nothing can be better than Beaucliffe. It is the pleasantest house we know, and the best conducted. Generally, it is full of company, but whenever you go there, you are certain of a warm welcome, and if there shouldn't be room, you can move on to Brereton. Stanley and his charming wife are cited—and we believe with truth—as the happiest couple in Cheshire; and it is said of her, that although passionately fond of her handsome husband, she is never jealous of him. But perhaps he gives her no cause.

THE END.









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